

31 TRAILS NEAR YOU BACKPACKER

GET OUT MORE

DREAM TRIPS ON ANY BUDGET

32 LIFE-LIST ADVENTURES STARTING AT \$25

**READERS'
CHOICE**
YOUR TOP TRIPS

**GIFT
GUIDE**

35 IDEAS FOR
EVERY HIKER

**EAT BETTER,
SPEND LESS**
DO-IT-YOURSELF
DEHYDRATED
FOOD

**WHERE
TO HIKE
NOW**
ESCAPE THE
COLD IN
THESE 7 PARKS



THERE IS NO AWAY.

If only there were a magical place we could send all our garbage, where it would never come back to haunt us. Sadly, this “away” doesn’t exist. Nobody understands this better than our National Parks. Each year, visitors add over 100 million pounds of trash to our nation’s landfills. Despite this, there is reason to celebrate. Over a decade ago, Subaru became the first U.S. auto manufacturer to become zero landfill, and now, in collaboration with the National Park Service and the National Parks Conservation Association, Subaru is leveraging that same environmental expertise to help the parks get to zero, too. It won’t be easy, but with your help, we believe we can make sure these crown jewels of America are gleaming for generations to come.

Get involved, and see the ongoing documentary series at subaru.com/environment.



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THEIR OPPORTUNITY

summitforsomeone.org



Summit for Someone is a fundraising program of Big City Mountaineers. We instill critical life skills in under-resourced urban youth through transformative wilderness mentoring experiences. Celebrating our 25th anniversary, we have led over 700 expeditions, served over 7,300 kids, and provided over 36,000 nights under the stars.

© [Background] Steven Reinhold [Lower Left] Alicia Martinez [Middle Left] Aaron Thomas



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BY RACHEL ZURER

Plus 29 more ideas, from hugging a wolf (\$25) to hiring a personal backcountry chef (\$1,000).

PHOTO BY GREG MCCOWN

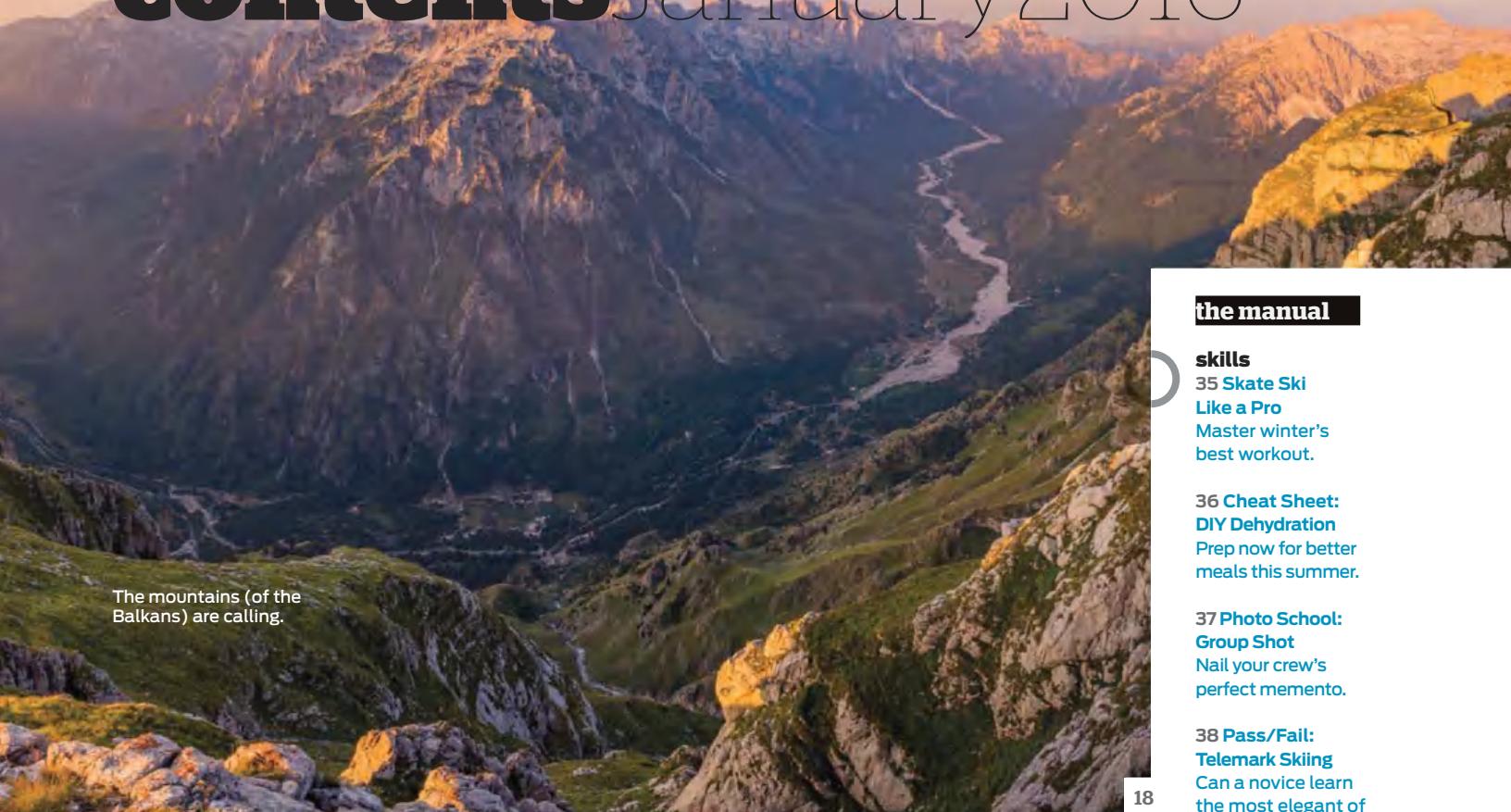
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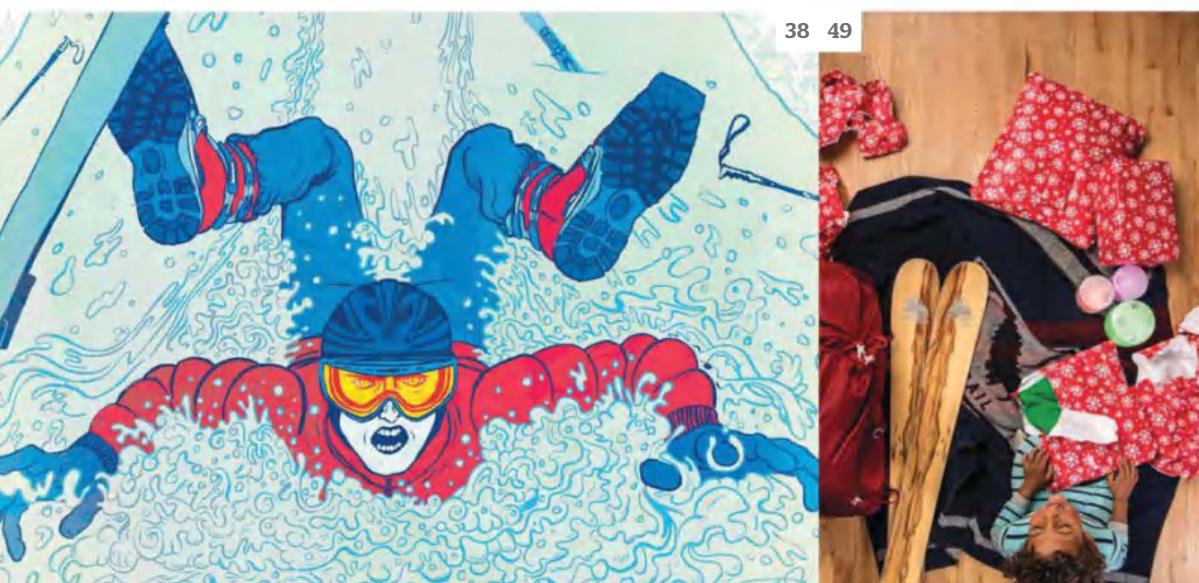
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PHOTOS BY JACK BRAUER; BEN FULLERTON / CAVEMAN COLLECTIVE; ILLUSTRATION BY JACOB THOMAS

A photograph of a group of people gathered around a campfire in a dense forest at night. The scene is lit by the fire and some ambient light, creating a cozy atmosphere. The text is overlaid on this image.

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AND CAMPFIRE SONGS.
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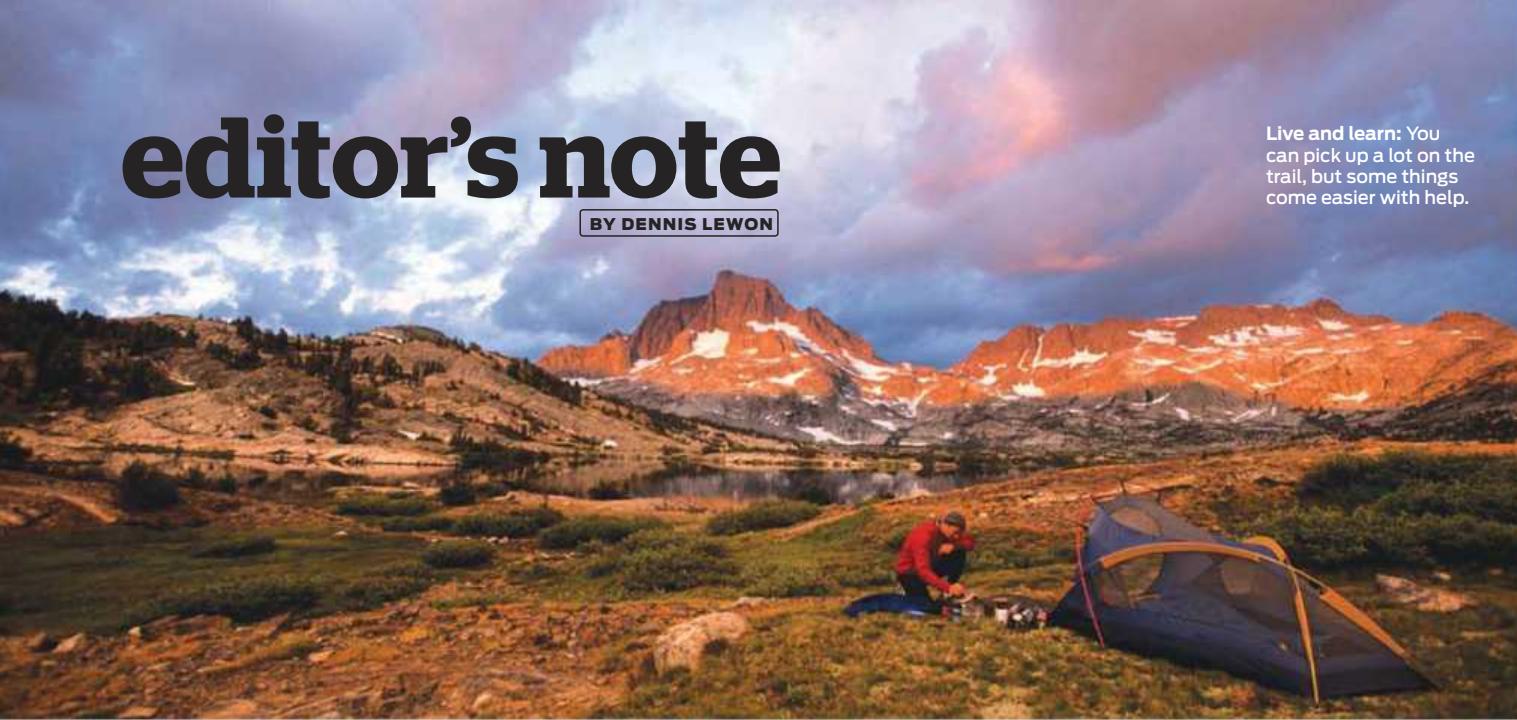
Keeping down insulation dry and functional can be a challenging endeavor in wet conditions. That's why we wrapped the 800+ fill goose down of the Floodlight Jacket in waterproof, breathable Pertex® Shield+ fabric. Our ingenious design ensures water never touches the down, completely blocks the wind and traps your body heat in even the most severe conditions. An ideal jacket for hiking, climbing or ski-touring in cold and wet environments, throwing on the Floodlight is a sure-fire way to stay warm and dry.

AVAILABLE FOR BOTH MEN AND WOMEN AT  AND SELECT OUTDOOR RESEARCH RETAILERS.

editor's note

BY DENNIS LEWON

Live and learn: You can pick up a lot on the trail, but some things come easier with help.



Adventure University

Outdoor education comes to you with our new online courses.

HOW DO BACKPACKERS LEARN the skills they need to be safe and successful in the outdoors? I thought about this question on a weekend hike last August. I was backpacking with two of my sons, Tate, 10, and Zig, 12, and three of their friends. Tate was "leading" the trip, taking charge of everything from menu planning to bear-bag hanging (see "Follow a 5th Grader," page 75). I was there for backup, of course, but I hoped the experience would jump-start the learning process, as it won't be long before the kids really are going backpacking on their own.

I'm confident they'll master the basics—planning a route, choosing and setting up camp, storing food—by participating on trips just like that one. But what about skills that require real teaching, like wilderness first aid? During our hike in Colorado's Never Summer Wilderness, there were plenty of opportunities for injuries—lake-jumping off slippery rocks, climbing trees, whittling marshmallow sticks. There were no serious mishaps, but I wondered how the kids would someday learn about treating wounds, splinting broken bones, or diagnosing a head injury. These aren't skills they—or anyone else—will simply pick up while backpacking with family

and friends. (My own education in first aid was not haphazard. I took a Wilderness First Responder course in order to work as a guide.)

Taking a wilderness first aid class is a smart way to prepare for a life in the outdoors. It's something we've long recommended, and something I hope my kids do before they're really in charge of their own adventures. But I know the challenges. Classes aren't always available near you, and even if they are, you have to go on their schedule.

That's why we're launching a new series of online courses (including wilderness first aid). Web-based learning has taken off everywhere from colleges to crafts, and it's perfect for outdoor education, too. There are simply some things you'd better learn before you head out. You can take classes at home, on the road—wherever and whenever you want, as long as you have a Wi-Fi connection. Go at your pace, on your schedule.

Our first two classes are launching in January: the aforementioned first aid class and one designed to help aspiring thru-hikers achieve their goal. Less than a third of those who attempt to thru-hike the Appalachian Trail complete their journey—which is a shame considering the cost and effort it takes just to get to the starting line. We've enlisted veteran thru-hiker Liz Thomas (who has completed the Triple Crown and held the women's self-supported speed record on the AT until this year) to provide expert instruction on preparing your food, gear, fitness, and—perhaps most importantly—your mind.

Starting this month, our first classes are open for preregistration (and yes, they make great gifts).

Basic Wilderness First Aid

Master patient assessment, treatment of common backcountry illnesses and injuries, and evacuation. **\$149**

Secrets of a Successful Thru-hike

Learn how to plan your route, manage resupplies, choose the right gear, and win the mental game. Starts at **\$199**

More info backpacker.com/courses

Give and Get

At this time of year, my gear closet overflows with gift ideas. Here are a few of my favorites. Find more on page 49.

Soto Titanium AeroMug 450

If you believe in form as well as function, you'll love this double-wall mug. It's definitely a want, not a need, which makes it a perfect holiday splurge. **\$45; 3.5 oz.**; sotooutdoors.com

Black Diamond Stance Gloves

These gloves pack small enough to stuff in a stocking, but PrimaLoft Gold insulation makes them warm enough for moderate winter weather. **\$70; 3 oz.**; blackdiamondequipment.com

BACKPACKER T-shirt

There's one for everyone on your list (see more styles on page 50). **\$22; backpacker.com/swag**





EMERGE AND SEE



One Emergen-C every day and you'll emerge restored, fortified and replenished. A super fresh formula packed with B vitamins, electrolytes, antioxidants[†] and more vitamin C than ten oranges.* Why not feel this good every day?

[†]Antioxidants include Vitamin C, Zinc and Manganese. *Based on using the USDA.gov nutrient database value for a large, raw orange. ©Alacer 2015

#trailchat

YOUR OPINIONS, PHOTOS, AND FEATS

Overheard

Our package about women and backpacking ("Curves Ahead," October) launched a flurry of letters and comments from readers. "I was glad to find useful information and respectful treatment of the issues," writes [Kathy Schrenk](#). "Score another one for BACKPACKER in the equality department." [Jenna Yokoyama](#) wasn't as impressed: "Although you do feature some useful information to the most novice of female backpackers, I found the tone to be upsetting... 'Curves Ahead' is hardly the way I would like to be described by the nation's most visible backpacking publication." Our apologies to Jenna and others who were offended by the title. "Our female editors saw it as a playful way to celebrate one of the differences that make women special," explains Senior Content Editor Rachel Zurer.

One piece of this story—Zurer's essay criticizing the Girl Scouts for not doing enough to get kids in the wilderness—resonated with many readers. But we were happy to hear about several programs that do get girls out.

[Klari Hixenbaugh](#) wrote us about Ellen Govan's YaYa Hikers program ([gpsyaya-hiker.com](#)) in Washington, which takes Girl Scouts on hikes and backpacking trips every month. And [Karen Linehan](#) drew our attention to Girl Scouts San Diego's "amazing and robust" outdoor adventure program: "We're always looking for more trainers!" she says.

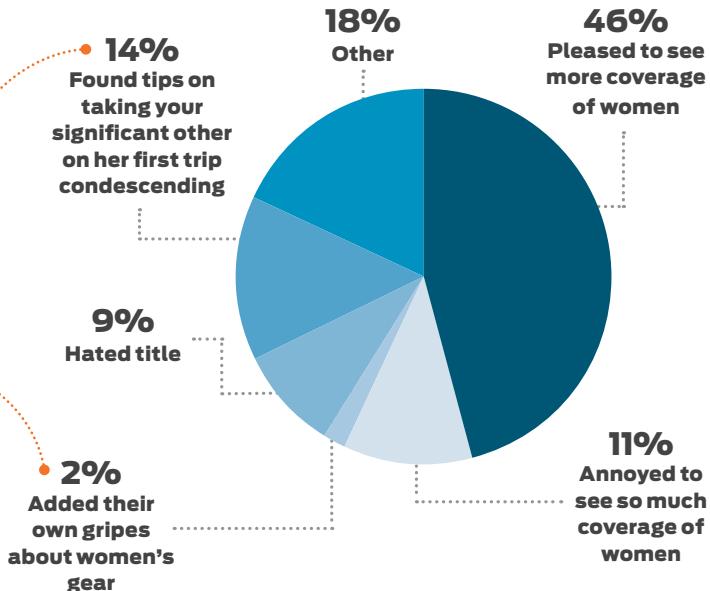


What You Said

How readers reacted to "Curves Ahead"

"Make Sure the First Trip Isn't the Last" We didn't mean it *that* way. These are the same tips we've given for escorting any first-timer, regardless of gender.

"We Still Have Trouble Finding Gear That Fits" Most manufacturers don't make women's clothes larger than size L, points out Véronique Lisi: "As an outdoor enthusiast wearing plus-size clothing, it is a real nightmare." Check out: Terramar, REI, Columbia.



Trending

From hut trips to holiday dinners, some of our favorite things happen in the winter. Make the most of it with our tips, tricks, and gear picks.

Do your friends hate winter camping? Strategize, scam, and beg them into going on a trip with our 10 handy tips at [backpacker.com/wintercamping](#).

Finish your Christmas shopping. Check out an expanded version of our 2015 Holiday Gift Guide at [backpacker.com/giftguide](#).

Playing in the snow has its risks. Learn how to keep yourself and your partners safe from hypothermia at [backpacker.com/hypothermia](#).



Chill out(side). Strap on your spikes and hit three of America's best ice hikes at [backpacker.com/icetrails](#).

Get educated. Learn the skills you need to plan a thru-hike, treat frostbite, and more with our new online courses. Get more information at [backpacker.com/courses](#).



BE THE GUY WITH THE STORY ABOUT THE BEAR.

YETI COOLERS ARE BUILT TO BE INDESTRUCTIBLE AND KEEP ICE FOR DAYS.
BUILT FOR GOING PLACES OTHERS DON'T. BUILT FOR UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTERS.
BUILT FOR KEEPING GRIZZLIES OUT OF YOUR LUNCH. BUILT FOR THE WILD.

#trailchat

Cleaning Up

After a receipt from a gear-buying binge flew out his car window, reader [Steven Reinhold](#) decided to gather 100 pieces of trash to make up for it. That effort later turned into [#trashtag](#), a campaign to get hikers to post pictures of the trash that they clean up. With support from gear producer UCO, Reinhold's campaign has since gone viral. Tweet your own [#trashtag](#) photos this month for a chance to be retweeted by [@BackpackerMag](#).



The most common items Reinhold has found: plastic bottles. The strangest: a kiddie pool.

Overheard

Jeff Brydon's story about surviving a volcanic eruption in Chile's Villarica National Park ("Out Alive," October) didn't sit well with reader [Richard Proulx](#), who wrote in from Argentina to chew us out for publishing it even though the hikers entered without permits. "Had these two gentlemen gotten into trouble and called for rescue, they could very easily have put the lives of the *guardaparques* and/or helicopter personnel in danger."

Editor's note: Like most backcountry emergencies, this one was the result of multiple mistakes—the decision to enter a closed park was of course one of them. We hope readers learn from these true tales of survival so they don't ever make the same mistakes.



 [Instagram](#)

Forest Retreat
[@LeBackpacker](#) captured this quiet moment on the path to Blue Pools in Mt. Aspiring National Park, during a two-year trip through New Zealand and Australia. "We had to shorten the shoot because it suddenly started to snow," he says.

Pay to Play

In October, roughly 100 areas managed by the National Park Service increased fees for everything from campsites to annual passes in an attempt to raise some of the \$11.5 billion the agency needs for deferred maintenance. With the NPS's centennial approaching, we asked our Facebook followers: Should Congress be putting more taxpayer money into our national parks?

YOUR VOTES



46%



54%

"Instead of buying bombs, let's start buying trees for our parks."
— Chris Winter

"If someone wants to go to a park, let them pay for it."
— Alan Stone

GETTING AWAY FROM IT ALL DOESN'T MEAN YOU HAVE TO LEAVE YOUR PEACE OF MIND AT HOME.

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- Plan, track, and share your journey
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*Offer valid for \$50 off inReach SE or \$75 off inReach Explorer models. Satellite subscription plan is required to use inReach. Offer valid when purchased and activated between November 15 – December 31, 2015. Valid for US and EU customers only. Visit inreachdelorme.com/holiday for full offer details.





Lake Jocassee at Devil's Fork State Park

Your home away from home. Sip your morning coffee from the summit of a lush mountain trail, joyride through Lake Jocassee's crystal-clear waters or unwind around the campfire as fresh-caught trout cooks over an open flame. Set up camp somewhere beautifully unfamiliar, and come to find that all the comforts of home are right outside your door.

South Carolina  **Just right.**

DiscoverSouthCarolina.com  

South Carolina ADVENTURE

AROUND EVERY TURN

Whether it's wild adventure, relaxing wilderness or endless exploration you seek, South Carolina is where you'll find it. With countless opportunities for adventure and surprises around every corner, South Carolina is the perfect place to explore the great outdoors — and getting there is half the fun.

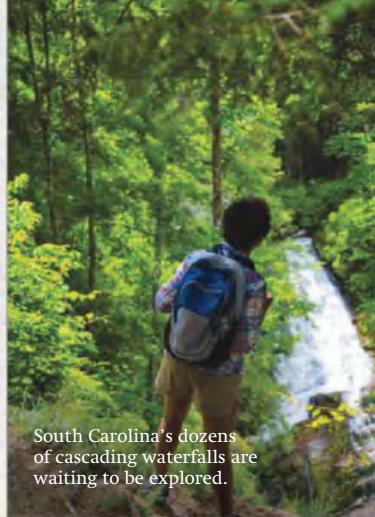
Our 80,000 acres of protected lands boast everything from exciting mountain trails and cascading waterfalls to blackwater rivers and coastal salt flats. From the Blue Ridge Mountains to the Atlantic coastline, South Carolina's diverse landscape offers outdoor enthusiasts the chance to rock climb, play a round of golf and surf all in the same day.



**Discover the
people, the food
and the culture
that make
South Carolina
Just Right.**

The Palmetto State's 14 major reservoirs, countless freshwater streams and 187 miles of Atlantic coastline are the perfect spots to dip your toes in the water or embark on the whitewater rafting adventure of a lifetime. Plus, with 10 warm-weather months each year, our lakes, rivers and beaches offer countless opportunities for fishing, kayaking, canoeing, paddleboarding, water skiing, surfing and even scuba diving.

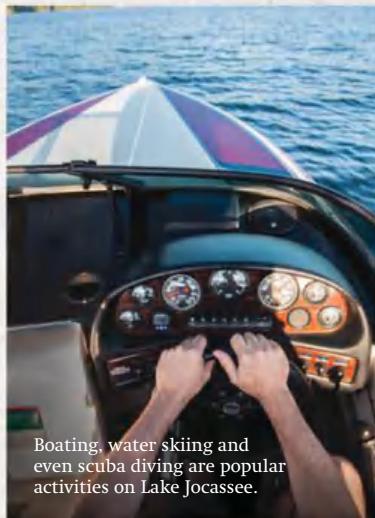
With 47 state parks, more than 200 barbecue restaurants along the SC BBQ Trail and over 3,000 campsites and RV campgrounds to choose from, you may just find that the outdoor adventure you've been looking for has been here all along. Whether you're an avid outdoorsman or a first-time trekker, there's a South Carolina getaway for every state of mind. Come experience the great outdoors like never before, and discover why South Carolina is Just Right for adventure. 



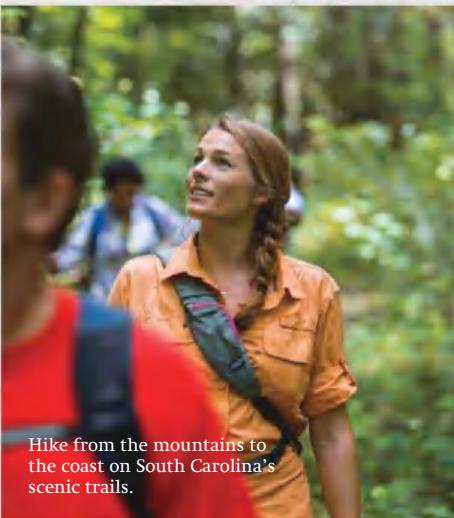
South Carolina's dozens of cascading waterfalls are waiting to be explored.



Spend the weekend at one of South Carolina's 47 state parks.



Boating, water skiing and even scuba diving are popular activities on Lake Jocassee.



Hike from the mountains to the coast on South Carolina's scenic trails.



016

01.2016

the play list

This month's top
trips and picks





1

Come in for a landing. **White Pocket, Vermilion Cliffs** **National Monument, AZ**

The quickest way to Mars: a trip to this trailless expanse of 20- and 30-foot-tall, multicolored formations in northern Arizona. White Pocket, which is still blissfully off the radar, was likely formed by a huge earthquake and subsequent sand slide, which petrified over millions of years. The rocks have the same swirly, layered look as the Wave, a popular sandstone slope just northwest of here in the Coyote Buttes, but, unlike the Wave, you can camp here and don't have to deal with any permit hassle. From US 89A, take House Rock Road 10 miles (high-clearance vehicle required) before splitting east onto Pine Tree Road for 15 miles to the parking area. The drive is a haul—make sure you have a shovel and a full tank. Photographer John Fowler recommends overnighting in the drive-up campground (free; first-come, first-serve): "If you do, you'll have White Pocket all to yourself." Midwinter temps can drop into the 20s, so pack warm. (Tip: Check out the beer list at Lee's Ferry Lodge on the way back.) **Contact** bit.do/VermilionBLM

LIFE LIST

2

Europe's Other Alps

Trek through three countries on this 10-day circuit through the Balkans' high peaks. BY HIRAK PARIKH

→ “BE CAREFUL! STAY ON THE PATH!” shouts our guide, Khustrim, as he maneuvers over loose gravel. “There may be uncleared landmines!” He’s wrong, of course, as the border area between Albania and Kosovo has been cleared for decades. But as a Kosovar, he lives with memories of a more dangerous time.

The war that ended in 1999 was devastating in obvious ways (it’s estimated that more than 12,000 people died), but it’s still having indirect fallout as well. Development and tourism stalled, further depressing the local economy and leaving the southernmost extension of the Dinaric Alps much wilder than anything else in Europe.

Relics from the area’s violent past intermingle with its natural beauty. We pass domed Albanian bunkers, then see greenish-blue alpine pools that shimmer in the sunshine. Bullet holes riddle the Yugoslav signposts that mark the country borders. Yet the posts stand in meadows amid blooming pink and yellow wildflowers.

We started this 120-mile circuit in Shkodër, the ancient capital of Albania, by the Adriatic Sea, and headed north toward Valbona to loop through 8,000-foot peaks. Eight thousand doesn’t seem all that high, but the Prokletije (or “accursed mountains”) earned their name for their sharp spires of crumbly limestone that were originally perceived as insurmountable. We hired a guide to assist in navigating across the borders and translating the myriad languages we were sure to encounter, but it’s also nice having him here for the

ongoing history lesson as we move through conifer forests and alpine meadows, and then dip into the canyons and gorges of the Rugova Valley.

At night, we take shelter in the homes of shepherds and eat savory pastries filled with lamb and potatoes. Some of the shepherds are Muslim, some Serbian Orthodox, and others Catholic—we never know until they invite us into their homes, which they do often. They discuss politics and history passionately with us in a mishmash that variously includes Albanian, Serbian, Montenegrin, Bosnian, Russian, Italian, and English.

It’s day four when we cross into Kosovo. Below, I can see the valley in Dobërdol where we spent the night shivering in the a shepherd’s drafty stone hut (nights are colder than I expected in August; I should have packed a 32°F bag). It’s a far cry from the posh huts in the Alps proper, but I’m more interested in meeting locals than other trekkers. Someday a hut system will come to this wild terrain, and that will surely be good for the economy, but I’m glad to beat the rush.

DO IT Fly into Tirana, then taxi or bus to Theth or Valbona. Follow the writer’s 10-day circuit (information at peaksofthebalkans.com), or browse the same website for a shorter route. Use a local operator (see below) to organize mandatory cross-border hiking permits (\$35). A guided 10-day trek costs about \$1,100 (recommended for communicating with locals and routefinding). **Season** June to September **Guide** zbulo.org



No. 3

Improve your resolutions.

New Year’s resolutions are like the jeans you used to fit into—they sit in your closet for a while and eventually get thrown away. Why not make some you’ll actually keep?

- Explore a new-to-you wilderness.
- Take a novice backpacking.
- Camp under the stars.
- Go solo.
- Hike 20 miles in a day.
- Buy a national parks annual pass...
- ...and get your money’s worth.
- Check off an off-trail objective.
- Plan a group trip.
- Take a weekend trip and pitch it to this magazine (see backpacker.com/guidelines).

4

Marinate.

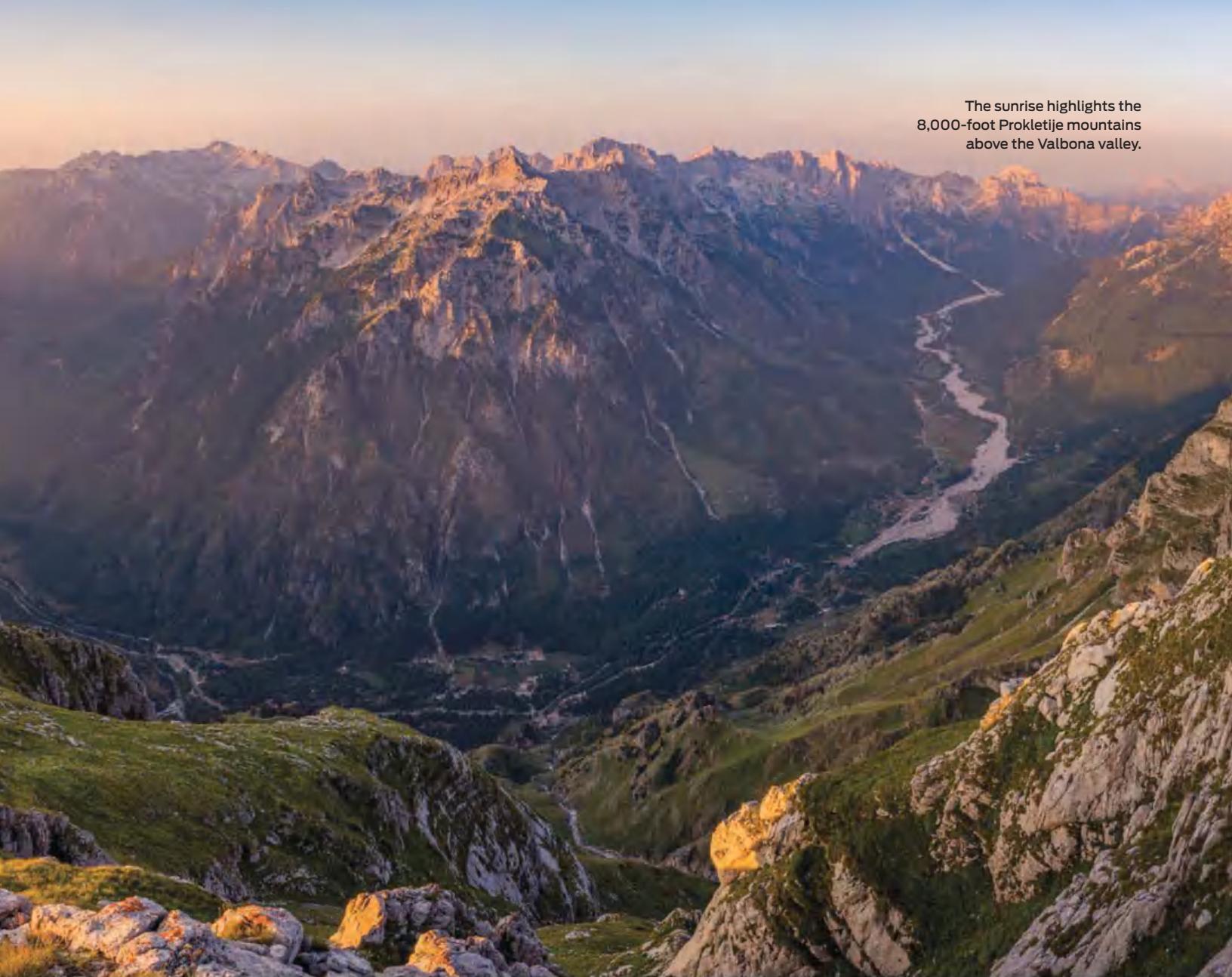
Colder temps mean a couple of things when it comes to hot springs: (1) Snow and hot water just go together better, and (2) Less foot traffic = more legroom. So, regardless of where you live, it’s time to reward tired muscles with a soak.



1. Conundrum Hot Springs

Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness, Colorado

Snowshoe or ski 8.5 miles through a valley below Fourteeners (avy knowledge required) on the Conundrum Creek Trail to two 100°F pools. Set up camp at the head of the canyon (free). **Contact** fs.usda.gov/whiteriver



The sunrise highlights the 8,000-foot Prokletije mountains above the Valbona valley.



2. Goldmyer Hot Springs

Snoqualmie National Forest, Washington

Take the snow-covered Middle Fork Trail and Dingford Creek Road 10 miles (traction devices or snowshoes required) to three 104°F pools (there's a quota, so call ahead for a reservation). Set up camp nearby if overnighting (\$5). Contact goldmyer.org

3. Sykes Hot Springs

Ventana Wilderness, California

Hike 10 miles on the snow-free Pine Ridge Trail from the coast through the Santa Lucias to three 102°F springs. The pools are terraced above the Big Sur River (wading required). Set up camp a half-mile upstream. Contact ventanawild.org

4. San Antonio Hot Springs

Santa Fe National Forest, New Mexico

From the San Antonio Campground, snowshoe or ski 5 miles along San Antonio Creek on FS 376 (closed to cars in winter) to four 100°F springs. Make it a 10-mile day trip or set up camp in the forest nearby. Contact fs.usda.gov/santafe

5

See the light.

**Little Presque Isle Point
Natural Area, Michigan**

You don't need to leave the country to watch the night sky dance. In fact, you don't even need to leave Marquette—just head out on the 1.6-mile section of the 4,600-mile North Country Trail from Wetmore Landing to Little Presque Isle (where this photo was snapped). From there, you can continue roughly 4 miles on to Harlow Lake and then circle back to the trailhead near mile 7. The aurora borealis can appear year-round, but winter, when nights are longer and clearer, offers the best conditions for spotting the colorful collision between the sun's electrically charged particles and Earth's atmosphere. (Check out the forecast before you head out at bit.do/michigan-aurora-forecast.) Know your palette: Greens are produced by oxygen molecules close to Earth's surface; reds by far-away oxygen molecules; and blues and purples by nitrogen. Contact northcountrytrail.org





PHOTO BY SHAWN MALONE / LAKESUPERIORPHOTO



Wisconsin's Mainland Ice Caves are different year to year, but you can count on finding cool formations at First Point.

DONE IN A DAY

6

Have an Ice Day

See how the deep freeze transforms Earth's interior on these nontechnical winter caving adventures.

BY LAURA LANCASTER

Mainland
Ice Caves,
Apostle Islands
National
Lakeshore
WISCONSIN

What happens when Lake Superior's sea caves are hit by -30°F cold fronts for months on end? A radical transformation from summer's watery paradise to winter's cathedrals of ice. To visit these constantly changing formations, try the 3-mile out-and-back from the

end of Meyers Beach Road. Traverse 1.1 miles northeast across frozen Lake Superior to First Point, the bend in the shoreline where millennia of running water eroded the sandstone cliffs to create caves. Continue northeast around the shore, passing the Crevasse, a 150-foot-deep cavern below curtains of ice that hang from a natural bridge, and the Keyhole, a natural arch formed in the sandstone. Near mile 1.5, head into the Garage, a 30-foot-tall room usually chock-full of ice stalactites. Since the frozen features can be unstable, call the park Ice Line at (715) 779-3398 beforehand to make sure conditions are safe for going inside. **Recommended gear** Lightweight traction device (we like Kahtoola MICROspikes), headlamp, trekking poles **Contact** bit.do/ApostleIceCaves

Ape Cave,
Mt. St. Helens
National
Volcanic
Monument
WASHINGTON

Consider this the Tough Mudder of caving: Navigating through this 1.5-mile-long tunnel requires hikers to tackle dozens of boulderfields, scale an 8-foot-tall rock wall, and shimmy on all fours through narrow passages. The 4.8-mile lasso loop can draw crowds

in summer, but not in winter: Enjoy North America's third-longest lava tube, formed 2,000 years ago when a layer of crust solidified above a river of molten lava, to yourself this month. From the Trail of Two Forests Sno-Park, snowshoe or hike (with traction devices) 1 mile north and take the Ape Cave Trail into the 88-foot-wide Big Room (via a metal staircase). In .5 mile, scramble over a house-size boulder pile—the first of 27. Near mile .8, climb over the lava wall, an 8-foot-tall, nearly vertical face (aids not needed). A ladder at mile 1.5 signals the tunnel's end; climb out and circle 1.3 miles back to the entrance of Ape Cave. **Recommended gear** Sturdy boots, lightweight traction device, headlamp, backup light source, heavy-duty gloves **Contact** bit.do/MtStHelens

Sam's Point Ice
Caves, Min-
newaska State
Park Preserve
NEW YORK

Descend into the largest open fault in the United States on this 3.2-miler and you'll get your pick of ice caves: Millennia of freeze-thaw cycles have eroded the cliff faces, creating caverns where the cold air lingers. The result? Subarctic climates—the per-

fect formula for year-round ice caves. Get there by linking the Long Path and Ice Caves Road for 1.3 miles. From there, follow the rocky path through narrow canyons and past small caves (expect some to fill with snow). Look for snowberry bushes and boreal trees en route to mile 1.8, where a short climb leads you out of the canyon system. Pick up the Ice Caves Road and circle 1.3 miles back to the visitor's center. Park officials can close the caves in winter when the route freezes shut, so call ahead to make sure it's open. **Recommended gear** Sturdy boots, lightweight traction device, headlamp **Contact** bit.do/SamsPoint

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INSIDER'S
7
GUIDE



See 100-foot Tamanawas Falls in frozen splendor after 1.8 miles on the East Fork Trail (#650).

Winter Wonder

Mt. Hood National Forest, Oregon

The 11,240-foot peak of Mt. Hood lords over the Oregon Cascades so dominantly, it draws in skiers, snowshoers, and backpackers like a tractor beam. Don't fight it: The volcano's snowy shoulders harbor white-dusted evergreens, iced-over lakes, and glacier-spattered views of the mountain from every angle. BY ELISABETH KWAK-HEFFERAN

The insider

Most winter weekends find Regis Krug out on the trails ringing Mt. Hood. As the chair of the Trail Trips Committee for the Mazamas hiking group, he leads up to three snowshoeing or hiking excursions per month.

Top snowshoe trip

Climb 3.2 miles through the woods to horizon-wide vistas of Mt. Hood. From the Tilly Jane Sno-Park, ascend 2.7 miles gradually through thickets of Douglas fir on the Tilly Jane Ski Trail (#643) to Tilly Jane Campground, which is closed in winter. (As always, 'shoe outside the ski track.) Connect to the Tilly Jane Trail (#600A) and stomp northwest another half-mile to the Cloud Cap Inn, a log shelter at 5,837 feet that was built in 1889 and doubles as the headquarters for the Hood River Crag Rats SAR team today. (It's usually closed in winter, but rangers lead tours in summer.) Continue just beyond the former inn to reach a rocky outcrop with unobstructed views of the mountain's northeast

face, including the rumpled Eliot Glacier. Bonus: The mostly forested route reduces avalanche danger.

Primo winter camping

On a clear night at 6,100-foot McNeil Point, the only thing that will distract you from the up-close views of Mt. Hood are the phenomenal winter stars glittering above. The access road to the Top Spur trail-head is unplowed in winter, so you might have to add up to 7 miles to your trip if you can't drive the whole way, warns Krug (it was clear the whole way last year, though). Snowshoe .5 mile through the trees to the Timberline Trail before tracing a ridge 4.5 miles above a series of alpine basins and around the cliff below McNeil Point to loop back from the east. Up top, you'll see the Coe and Sandy Glaciers, including a clear look at Sandy's rippling ice caves. You can camp inside the windowless stone shelter on the point, but Krug prefers the sites nestled behind small rock windbreaks just beyond.

Ski in solitude

Cross-country skiers glide to and from Trillium Lake in packs, and no wonder: In winter, the Forest Service grooms the trail circling the lake, making for a smooth, 4.4-mile (round-trip) route from Trillium Sno-Park through evergreen forest. Step into cross-country skis that can handle ungroomed terrain and keep on kicking past the lake's north side on the unplowed Forest Road 2612 to Sherar Burn Road (FS 2613), where you'll shake the crowds on a 14.1-mile (round-trip) ski. For this mostly intermediate-level trip, swing south on the road and traverse the ridge above Trillium Lake, passing under Veda Butte as you gain about 600 feet. Leave the road and strike out into the woods around mile 7 on the Veda Lake Trail (the turnoff is easy to miss; look for a small pullout on the road and a Veda Lake trail sign). Climb another 500 feet in a half-mile (the steeper, narrower trail makes for more advanced-level skiing on this stretch) to the ridge above frozen

Veda Lake. You can pick your way down to the shore from here, but Krug sticks to the high ground to preserve the best Mt. Hood vista.

All-ages sledding

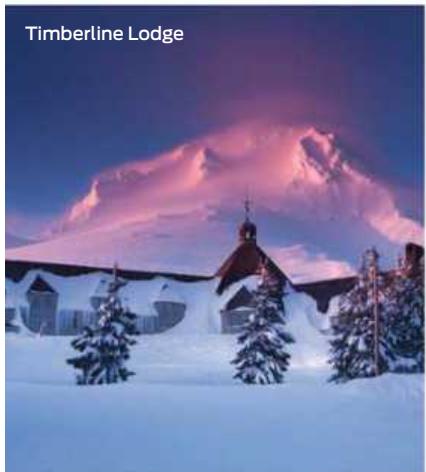
Top cure for cabin fever: Load up the sleds and head straight to the White River West Sno-Park, where a swath of wide slopes undulate directly under Mt. Hood's southeastern face. Options range from kid-friendly bunny hills to runs steep enough to please adrenaline-hungry adults a bit farther up the canyon. The easy-access slopes attract their share of saucer-toting families on weekends, so target weekdays.

Best post-trip meal

Nothing fuels the appetite quite like a day spent tromping around in the snow. For the most satisfying—and atmospheric—culinary reward, head to Calamity Jane's in Sandy. "They have fantastic burgers, and it's in an Old West-style building with dollar bills stapled all over the ceiling and walls," Krug says.

Winter classic

Mt. Hood's iconic Timberline Lodge (below) is the hub for cold-season activity on the mountain. The 1930s-era complex might look familiar from its star turn as the Overlook Hotel in *The Shining*. It sits at the base of the country's only year-round ski area and serves as the jumping-off point for miles of ski/snowshoe trails and backcountry ski routes into the national forest. You can certainly go luxe here (think hot tub soaking and fine dining), but the lodge is well worth a visit just to kick back with a (free) coffee in front of the lobby's 90-foot-tall stone fireplace.



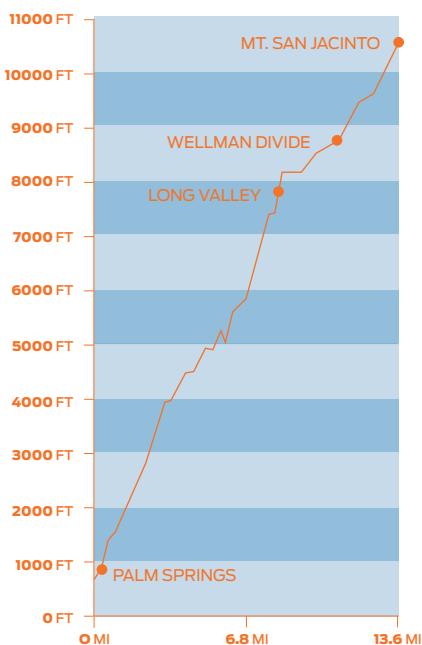
Trip Planner

Season November to April for winter conditions; July through October for snow-free trails **Permit** Oregon Sno-Park permit required to park at most winter trailheads (\$20/annual or \$7/day); many local gear shops and resorts carry them. **Contacts** fs.usda.gov/mthood; timberlinelodge.com

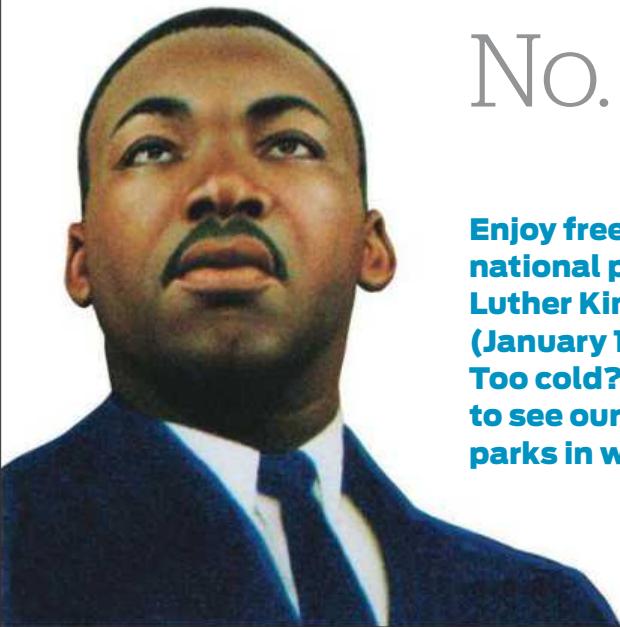
8

Get the best quad workout.

With desert temps back down in the 70s, there's no better time to check off one of the country's hardest dayhikes: SoCal's Cactus to Clouds. The 13.6-miler (one way) gains 10,600 feet of elevation as it climbs from the desert to the top of 10,804-foot Mt. San Jacinto. Start before dawn on the Museum/North Lykken Trail in Palm Springs; take it .8 mile to the Skyline Trail. From there, it's 8 miles up a boulder-and-cacti-covered slope to the summit spur in Long Valley. Gain the final 2,400 feet on the 4.8-mile San Jacinto Peak Trail, and then score a view all the way to the coast that includes 11,485-foot San Gorgonio Mountain. Return the way you came or downclimb to Long Valley and pick up the tram (\$12). Overnights can set up camp at any of six camping areas along the route (\$5; permit required). Note: The peak can be icy in winter; call ahead to check conditions. [Contact](http://bit.do/MtSanJacintoSP) bit.do/MtSanJacintoSP



No. 9



Enjoy free admission to national parks on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day (January 18 this year). Too cold? Flip to page 54 to see our favorite sunny parks in winter.

IN THE CLUB

10

...in which we honor the best **hiking clubs in the country.**

→ If only the economy grew as fast as the Mid-Atlantic Backpackers, which formed in 2008. The club adds about 10 to its number (currently at 885) every week. At this rate, their membership will double in two years. Their trail menu—beginner, moderate, and advanced overnights weekly—isn't too bad either, so if you're in the DC area, help keep the growth going. [Contact](http://meetup.com/Mid-Atlantic-Backpackers) meetup.com/Mid-Atlantic-Backpackers



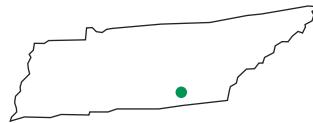


A dense forest of tall palm trees in El Yunque National Forest, Puerto Rico. The scene is filled with the trunks of palm trees of various heights, their fronds creating a complex canopy. Sunlight filters through the leaves, creating bright highlights and deep shadows. The overall atmosphere is lush and tropical.

11

**Head south for the winter.
El Yunque National Forest,
Puerto Rico**

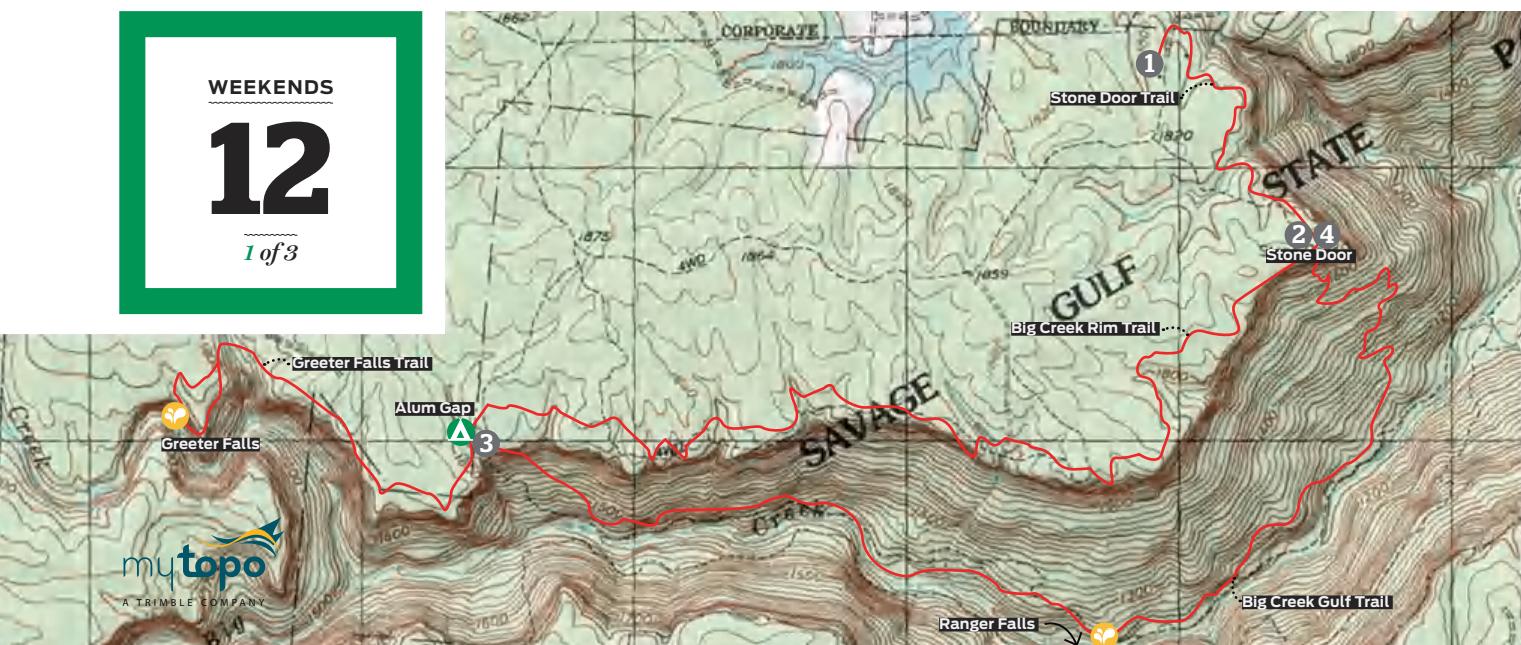
Even Tarzan would be impressed with this rainforest, which averages 120 inches of precipitation annually. Puerto Rico's El Yunque, the only tropical forest in the U.S. National Forest system, is home to coquíes (tree frogs), giant tree ferns (pictured)—and 24 miles of hiking trails. So put it atop your bucket list and get down there this winter. (January temps in the 80s? Yes, please.) Photographer Nathan Dappen recommends the 5-mile loop up 3,496-foot El Yunque Peak for views of the coastal plain and Atlantic to the north and Caribbean Sea and islands of Culebra and Vieques to the east. Circle back on the Mt. Britton Trail (where this image was snapped). Contact fs.usda.gov/elyunque



WEEKENDS

12

1 of 3



Rim to Rim

Savage Gulf State Natural Area,
Tennessee

From my vantage, the sandstone chasms stretching through the wilderness look like tentacles. They spread across the Cumberland Plateau and out of view. Scattered within them, 50-foot cascades spill over escarpments into jade pools. It's no wonder this area, known as Savage Gulf, draws crowds. But not in January. I can see plumes of my breath drift away as I parallel Big Creek midway through an 8.6-mile loop—a small price to pay for getting one of the South's prettiest spots to myself. BY ERIC HARRISON



Turn-by-turn

From the Stone Door Ranger Station

- ① Head 1 mile south on the **Stone Door Trail** to a junction.
- ② Continue south into the gorge via the **Big Creek Gulf Trail** to complete the loop clockwise. (You could take the Rim Trail and do it counterclockwise, but we recommend tackling the gorge on fresh legs.) Hike 3.6 miles west to Alum Gap ③.
- ③ Split east onto the **Big Creek Rim Trail** and take it 3 miles back to the Stone Door junction.
- ④ Retrace your steps to the parking lot.



Campsite

Alum Gap (mile 4.6)

Nab one of the sites closer to the gorge (4 through 8) for the best views—and a sunrise with your coffee. You must camp in a designated spot, and the 10 sites at Alum Gap (\$3; reserve online) are the only ones along the route. There's an out-house, fire rings, and one group campsite (for parties larger than eight). Be sure to top off your water at Big Creek before climbing out of the gorge, as these sites are dry.



Chasing waterfalls

In January, some of this area's many cascades will freeze over into intricate towers, but 60-foot Ranger Falls and 62-foot, two-tiered Greeter Falls flow year-round. To see the former, split south for about .5 mile on the Ranger Falls Trail (near mile 2.8 on day one). Make sure you have room on your memory card for the latter, though: A 1.2-mile walk west from Alum Gap on the Greeter Falls Trail lands you by the 12-foot upper falls. Downclimb to reach the 50-foot lower falls (if you visit in summer, take a dip in the swimming hole here).



Stone Door

Linger at the Stone Door near mile 1 for the best vista on the hike. This 100-foot natural staircase—named for a crack in the rock that looks like a door ajar—faces the limestone escarpment that formed 250 to 325 million years ago when seas covered this area.



Season

Expect daytime temps in the 40s if you go in winter. Beware the slick, often-icy rocks, and be prepared to ford frigid, ankle-deep water once or twice—but nothing beats winter's solitude. Spring is also chilly, but the budding trees are beautiful. Summer is crowded. Fall showcases the foliage.

DO IT Trailhead 35.446250, -85.656366; 7 miles northeast of Altamont on Stone Door Rd. **Permit** Required for camping (\$3); obtain one at the park office or at bit.do/cumberland-permit. **Custom map** bit.do/BPmapSavageGulf **Contact** bit.do/SouthCumberlandSP **Trip data** backpacker.com/SavageGulf

Trip stats

Distance: 8.6 miles (loop)

Time: 2 days

Difficulty: ★★★★

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CASIO

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The Aqua Peak massif is actually comprised of three summits: Aqua proper, Spectre, and Dyadic (pictured). Head a mile southwest from Inner Basin Pass to reach them.

WEEKENDS

13
2 of 3

Winter Refuge

Joshua Tree National Park,
California

I need to scramble on all fours to reach the top of the crumbly ridge. When I look up to survey my progress, I see canyons splitting the desert in every direction. The boulder-strewn wash I followed to get here melts into the desert floor, which is dotted with Joshua trees and yellow wildflowers. I feel like a pioneer in the Wild West—not a tourist midway through a 10.4-mile overnight in a national park. There are no trails in the northeast corner of Joshua Tree National Park, so this could actually be the first time someone has climbed this ridge. But it won't be the last. BY EMELIE FROJEN



Turn-by-turn

From milepost 73 on Twenty-nine Palms Highway (CA 62)

- Head 3.6 miles south toward the Coxcomb Mountains in a distinct, unnamed wash to where it merges with another (much larger) wash at the base of the mountains.
- Continue southeast into the canyon to the end of the wash  near mile 4.4.
- Scramble .8 mile to the top of Inner Basin Pass.
- Retrace your steps.



Campsite

End of the wash (mile 4.4)

There are no designated sites, but we like the plateau at the head of the canyon because it offers a see-forever view down the wash and easy access to Inner Basin Pass. Pack in all water (a gallon per person per day in mild, winter conditions). If weather allows, leave the tent at home and sleep under Joshua Tree's famed starry sky.



Choose Your Own Adventure

From your basecamp, explore the Coxcomb Mountains. There are no trails, so pick a side canyon, wash, or drainage and follow it to its end (or as far as your legs will let you). One peakbagging option: From Inner Basin Pass, head a mile southwest to the unofficially named 4,416-foot Aqua Peak massif (pictured above).



Tortoises

Desert lavender wildflowers (blooming at lower elevations and in washes as early as late January), cactus pads, and Joshua Tree yucca (fruiting in early spring) double as tortoise food. Identify the plants, then scan nearby for the high-domed, brown

shells of desert tortoises (they're most active January through May). Note: Park rangers are trying to track the tortoise population (they're threatened), so if you spot one, stop at the visitor center on your way out and let them know where.

DO IT Trailhead 34.095200, -115.420583; 40 miles east of the Twentynine Palms Visitor Center off CA 62 **Season** September through May; expect lows the 30s in mid-winter. **Permit** Required for camping (free) **Custom map** bit.do/BPmapInnerBasinPass **Contact** nps.gov/jotr **Trip data** backpacker.com/InnerBasinPass

Trip stats

Distance: 10.4 miles (*out and back*)
Time: 2 days
Difficulty: ★★★★☆

No. 14

Be a beach bum.

Winter in the Windy City doesn't need to sentence you to house arrest. In fact, Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore may even be better in when snow overlays the sand hillocks (less mess!). Try the Glenwood Dunes Trail, which loops 6.4 miles through the woods and beach. If conditions allow, tackle it with snowshoes or cross-country skis. [Contact](http://bit.do/indiana-dunes-in-winter) bit.do/indiana-dunes-in-winter



No. 15

See eagles in the desert.

Some of the original snowbirds—around 300 bald eagles—head to central Arizona each year for winter. See them floating on thermals along the Mogollon Rim or throughout the White Mountains. A good bet: the 3.7-mile Woods Canyon Lake Trail in Sitgreaves National Forest (on the Rim).



WEEKENDS

16

3 of 3

Classic Northwoods

St. Croix State Park, Minnesota

Despite freezing temps and the snow-covered scene before me, I'm sweating beneath my pack and the brilliant sunshine. The cold is, of course, predictable as I'm just an hour and a half outside the Twin Cities in midwinter. What I couldn't have guessed, however, is the effect winter has on this wilderness. The Northwoods' familiar scent of birch mingled with spruce and pine is somehow stronger. The evergreens themselves look even prettier under pillows of snow, and the usual silence is magnified. But as lovely as this winter wonderland is, I'd still rather not camp on a bed of snow, which is why I'm snowshoeing 5 miles to an elevated shelter. I love winter, but not *that* much. **BY KOREY PETERSON**



Turn-by-turn From St. Croix Lodge

- ① Head 1.6 miles north on the right branch of an unnamed loop trail to a junction.
- ② Take the bypass .1 mile west to unpaved **St. John's Road** (closed to vehicles in winter).
- ③ Link up with the road for 2 miles to St. John's Landing at mile 3.8.
- ④ Veer north (hiker's left) through gate #14 and continue .7 mile to another fork.
- ⑤ Proceed .3 mile east onto the **Matthew Lourey State Trail**.
- ⑥ Turn north onto **Crooked Creek Trail** and walk another .4 mile to a Y-junction.
- ⑦ Stay left and take the spur .4 mile to Crooked Creek campground **▲**.
- ⑧ Retrace your steps to the trailhead.



Campsite Crooked Creek (mile 5.7)

Nab one of two three-walled Civilian Conservation Corps shelters that overlook the wetlands to the northeast (\$13 or \$15, depending on season) so you can get off the snowy ground at night. Each has raised sleeping platforms for three people and a fire pit outside.



Birding

With woodlands, rivers, and swamps, St. Croix is home to hundreds of bird species. Print out the checklist at bit.do/stcroixbirds and see how many you can ID. In winter, look for northern cardinals, red-tailed hawks, purple finches, and a number of owls, including screech, snowy, long-, and short-eared.



Season

You can usually snowshoe or cross-country ski in winter, but call ahead to check: Last year's milder winter, for example, left trails snow-free. Spring brings wildflowers, summer is best for paddling, and the sugar maples and birches turn in fall.

DO IT Trailhead 45.952746, -92.567475; 23 miles east of Hinckley on St. Croix Park Rd. **Permit** None **Custom map** bit.do/BP-mapStCroix **Contact** bit.do/StCroixSP **Trip data** backpacker.com/StCroix

Trip stats

Distance: 11.3 miles (out and back)
Time: 2 days
Difficulty: ★★★★★

THE GOOD FIGHT

Lush uplands in the high desert mesh with the stark canyons created by eastern Oregon's Owyhee River to create one of the largest conservation opportunities in the Lower 48: the Owyhee Canyonlands. Home to pronghorn, bighorn sheep, and Rocky Mountain elk (as well as ancient archaeological sites), this BLM-managed tract of land seeks recognition as designated wilderness or national monument, thanks to efforts from the Conservation Alliance and the Oregon Natural Desert Association. Learn more at onda.org.



18

THE EXPERIENCE

→ **IN SUMMER, THE WILDERNESS**
surrounding my parents' cabin in Colorado's Sangre de Cristo Range looks about as dangerous as a scene from *Bambi*: Rabbits, elk, mule deer, bobcats, and the occasional bear prance out of ponderosa groves and through knee-high grasses on cue. The worst thing you'll have to contend with is a muddy trail.

But winter brings short days and cold nights. The few human inhabitants pack up for warmer climates, creeks freeze in the negative-degree temps, and 7-foot-high snowdrifts hunch over road corners like

All for One: Winter Siege

When the snow starts falling, teamwork is the only way to roll.

BY TED ALVAREZ

sleeping polar bears, sealing the place off.

To most people. But my family is a different breed, unable to resist the total solitude, spindrift spiraling through tree-filtered sunlight, an endless carpet of powder—and the promise of a fire to chase out the chill. Crossing the 7 frozen miles has become a New Year's tradition for my family 10 years running. Over that time and those miles, we've learned the value of the Winter Siege, the all-hands approach that turns winter epics into fireside stories.

On one early winter attempt, our tank-tracked ATV bogged down on a

particularly heinous snowdrift 2 miles in. We'd left at 10 a.m.—plenty of time, we thought—but no amount of technique or brute force could dislodge the doomed vehicle from its grave. So we ditched it, strapped on snowshoes, and prepared to haul as many supplies as we could stuff into our packs, prioritizing the beer and wine. Midafternoon sun gave us confidence we had enough light for the 5 miles of untraversed snow ahead.

Breaking trail through deep snow and up steep grades takes a toll, and it didn't take long for my late-50-something parents' pace to slacken. Then my mom caught a snowshoe and fell, twisting a knee already weakened by old ski injuries. As that happened, the sun slipped behind Blanca Peak for good, ushering in deep purples and cold winds. The change from afternoon hike to evening epic was fast: We had 2 miles to go, it was dark, and my mom could only hobble a few feet per minute before stopping to wince and rest.

We inched across crusted slabs while the wind raked us raw. Jeff, my 23-year-old brother, began to shiver and couldn't feel his feet; he'd only brought lightweight "cabin" layers. With the rules that governed my family's usual interactions blown away in the breeze, three headstrong personalities turned to me—the backpacker—to unite them. I quickly triaged their fatigue and warmth and turned four individuals into a team. First, I dispatched my brother to run to the cabin to start the fire I knew we'd need.

My mom, dad, and I pushed on until my dad's muttering turned toward delirium. He wanted to stay with the group,

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but I knew by sticking around he'd become a liability so I gave him a job, too: widen the track for me and mom.

Meanwhile, my mom's pace had slowed to about 200 yards an hour. Could I rig my avy shovel to pull her? Nope. Could I carry her? Deep breath. In 50- to 100-yard stretches, I shuttled the packs ahead and then ran back and carried my mom the same distance. I strained to hold onto her legs through thick gloves, shuffling along the path broken by the others.

I pretended like it was easy as I grunted out involved questions to distract her from the pain. But she distracted me, too: telling jokes and old stories and marveling at how quiet and special snow-cloaked woods can be in the dead of night. A survival epic was going on, but she either didn't notice or knew basking in the fear wouldn't make a difference anyway. Her chatter kept me going. I repeated the haul-mom-and-packs process until we finally saw a glow through the trees. The cabin. It was 11 p.m.

Inside, Jeff and my dad huddled by the roaring stove, telling tales of hallucinations, wrong turns, swooping owls. I collapsed to the carpet. My refreshed mom had the reserves to keep the fire going and spirits high. Soon, we were thawed and self-medicating with a Malbec slushy. But only because of our teamwork: brother's speed to the fire, dad's dogged trailblazing, my donkey endurance, mom's unflappable good humor. It all got us pulling in the same direction, ensuring that this is a story we get to keep telling around the winter fire every New Year's Eve. ■

No. 19

Have yourself a wild little Christmas.

Go for solitude with a DIY holiday celebration outdoors (pack out your tinsel), or go luxe and enjoy one of these festive feasts before tackling some of the country's finest trails.

1. Zion Lodge

Zion National Park, Utah

Indulge in turkey (\$28 per person; zionlodge.com), then pick up the Sand Bench Trail right out the door and see the Court of the Patriarchs (mile 1.3), The Sentinel (mile 2.1), and The Streaked Wall (mile 2.2).

2. Lake Quinault Lodge

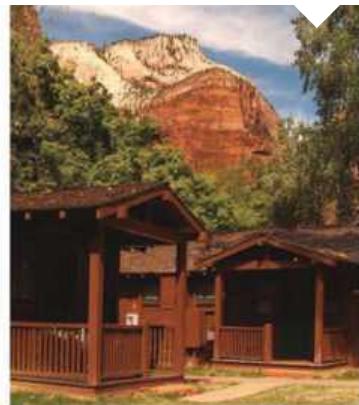
Olympic National Park, Washington

Warm up with a fireside feast (\$42; olympicnationalparks.com) after exploring the iced-over lakeshore or the 8 miles of nature trails across the street.

3. Chisos Mountains Lodge

Big Bend National Park, Texas

Enjoy an all-you-can-eat buffet of traditional Christmas eats (\$20 to \$30; chisomountainslodge.com), then see classic South Rim scenery on the Laguna Meadows Trail.



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Skills

Skate Ski Like a Pro

Why glide when you can fly? That's how **skate skiing** feels compared to classic XC: fast. But poor form wastes energy from your toes to your fingertips. Follow the advice of pro Nordic skier Jessie Diggins, the 2013 world champion and 2015 world silver medalist. **BY LISA JHUNG**

1. Get in ready position. Start in a typical athletic stance: Bend your knees and elbows, curve your back into a semi "C" shape, and make sure your center of gravity is over your feet so you're ready to absorb any bump in the trail. **2. Complete each kick.** Skate skiing differs from classic skiing in that you use a side-to-side kick to propel yourself forward, like ice skating. "But since skis are much longer than ice skates," Diggins says, "it's important to complete the kick on one side before shifting your body weight to the other." Finishing your kick will give you a faster glide and smoother skate. **3. Stay aligned.** Imagine a box made up of the corners of your shoulders and hips, and imagine that box facing down the trail at all times. The box should move side-to-side, but not twist. **4. Keep your core engaged.** This encourages every single part of your body to work together. **5. Use your arms.** Pushing off both poles in unison is called a "V2." To coordinate your arms with what your legs are doing, simultaneously plant (don't slam) your poles next to you as you initiate a kick. Crunch your core, pulling yourself forward. **6. Enjoy the glide.** To get the most out of each kick, relax your grip on your poles and rest for a moment, keeping your knees, ankles, and elbows loose, and your back curved and active (don't stand up tall) while you glide.



Fast fitness: Skate skiing burns more than 700 calories per hour. (Pictured: Moraine Lake Road, Banff National Park)

DIY Trail Food

Eat better next summer by dehydrating camp meals this winter. Chef Glenn McAllister, author of *Recipes for Adventure: Healthy, Hearty & Home-made Backpacking Recipes* (BackpackingChef.com), shares his top tips.

GROUND BEEF

Work $\frac{1}{2}$ cup breadcrumbs into a pound of lean ground beef before cooking and dehydrating. The breadcrumbs improve rehydration.

RICE

Precook rice in low-fat vegetable, chicken, or beef broth before dehydrating to make a flavorful starch.

UNSTUFFED PEPPERS

This hearty meal tastes just like homemade stuffed peppers: Combine $\frac{3}{4}$ cup dried rice, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup dried ground beef, $\frac{1}{3}$ cup dried bell peppers, and $\frac{1}{3}$ cup tomato sauce leather. Rehydrate with $1\frac{3}{4}$ cups boiling water and wait 15 minutes.



POTATOES

Dried grated potatoes rehydrate well. Steam peeled potatoes and grate like hash browns directly onto covered dehydrator trays. Or make a flavorful gravy: Boil potatoes and mash or blend with low-fat vegetable, chicken, or beef broth (don't use butter or milk, which can spoil) and spread thinly on dehydrator trays.

BEANS

Dehydrate canned beans instead of home-cooked beans, which remain hard after rehydrating. Or make “bean bark,” which dissolves into a delicious sauce that goes well with dried meat, vegetables, and rice. Run beans through a blender with enchilada sauce, barbecue sauce, or salsa and spread mixture thinly on covered trays.

VEGETABLES

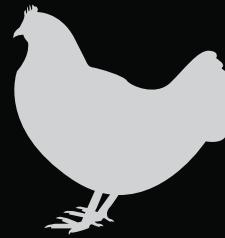
Enhance color and improve rehydration by lightly steaming carrots, corn, peas, green beans, and broccoli before dehydrating. Dry tomatoes, bell peppers, onions, and mushrooms raw.

TOMATO SAUCE

If sauce has chunky vegetables, run it through a blender first—and avoid cheesy sauces, which can spoil. Spread sauce thinly on covered trays.

CHICKEN

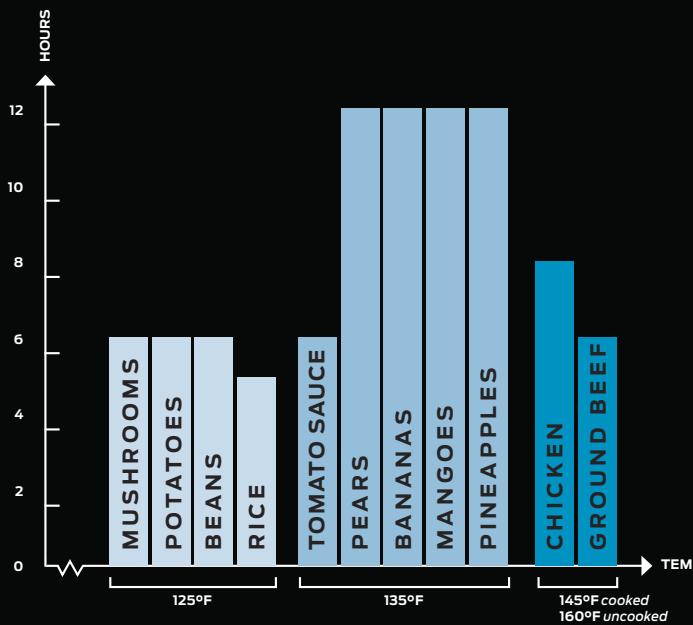
Dehydrated canned chicken rehydrates much better than grilled, baked, or fried chicken, which get tough when dried.



GET THE RIGHT DEHYDRATOR.

You want a fan and temperature control because vegetables, fruit, and meat are dried at different temps. Without a fan, food takes too long to dry. A built-in timer allows you to set the dehydrator to turn off while you're sleeping or at work. Buy nonstick sheets or fruit leather inserts so you can dry fruit leather, soup, and sauce.

DEHYDRATION TIMES



Group Shot

Learn how to commemorate your crew with a frame-worthy shot that puts selfies to shame.
By Genny Fullerton

SUMMIT OF TETE BLANCHE,
SWITZERLAND

SPECS: F/4.0, 1/500, 17MM FOCAL LENGTH, ISO 100



ARRANGE THE PEOPLE

Position the camera so the group isn't squinting into the sun. Get close enough that people are big within the frame and their faces are easily recognizable. Make sure no one's obscuring someone else's face. Use a tripod, or rest the camera on a pack or rock so you can be in the photo, too.

INCLUDE THE SCENE

A wide-angle lens will pull in more of the surroundings. Best time for a group shot? Whenever the background views are incredible. An unexpected camera angle, such as this super-low view, can also add interest. Auto exposure settings are usually a good bet for these shots.

ADD ENERGY

Your shot will be more lively if the group poses in a dynamic way, like giving high fives or jumping in the air. Solicit ideas from the group: Buy-in leads to patience with the process. Have fun and don't be afraid to get silly; it makes the smiles more genuine.

JUMP IN YOURSELF

Even better than a 10-second timer: Set the camera to take several images about a second apart and have the group play around as the camera shoots. Smartphone options: CameraSharp Free (free; iOS; screens-mudge.com) or Camera FV-5 (\$4; Android; camerafv5.com).

MASTER THE HANDOFF

If you find a volunteer who doesn't mind pressing the shutter button, use him or her—wisely. Take a preview shot first, then point out the key elements of your ideal composition (like including mountain scenery along the whole bottom of the frame in this shot) before handing it off.

key skill

FORCE THE FLASH If your foreground is dark and the background is bright (like when your group is in the shade in front of a sunlit waterfall), you should balance the image by using the flash to brighten the foreground. Because the scene has plenty of light overall, the flash won't automatically fire, so you'll need to turn it on manually. Get close enough to the foreground subjects for the flash to reach them (about 4 feet or less).



THE CHALLENGE

Telemark Skiing

Free-the-heel fans call it the most elegant way to get down a mountain. Can our man learn to turn?

By Dennis Lewon

When I was a kid I took gymnastics for about six months. My older sister wanted to try it, so I was enrolled by default. Amid all the somersaulters and cart-wheelers, I got the impression that doing the splits is a goal everyone aspires to. I tried—and learned that doing the splits was not something I aspired to.

Thirty years later, I'm worried about relearning that lesson. I'm in the backcountry near Wyoming's Togwotee Pass in March, at the top of a moderate, open slope I just skinned up. The sky is blue, the wind calm, the snow soft. A perfect day. But I can't get a vision out of my mind: me, bending my knee over one ski, midway through my first turn, as

the other ski shoots forward, out of control. Splits.

I decided to try tele skiing because my friend, Garth, took it up a few years before and kept telling me how great it is. He isn't alone. The mountains are full of tele evangelists who love to say "free your heel and ski for real" and wax poetic about "the most graceful winter sport." It's hard to argue when you see an accomplished tele skier link one fluid turn after another.

Nineteenth-century skiers in Telemark, Norway, developed the technique, wedging their downhill ambition to the Nordic gear of the time, which didn't allow you to lock your heel in place like today's conventional

alpine gear. The tele turn was the standard until the mid-20th century, when the new equipment, with safer release mechanisms, helped popularize downhill skiing for the masses. (Releasable tele bindings are now available, too.)

I was one of the masses, learning to ski on "fixed-heel" alpine gear—and I was perfectly happy with the result. With today's alpine touring gear, which allows you to free your heel for touring and lock it down for descending, I can take what I already know to the backcountry and do just fine. But still. I felt like I was missing out when Garth and others talked about the afterglow of a perfect tele turn. So when he invited me to join him on a trip to Togwotee, a popular backcountry spot near Jackson Hole, I decided it was time to try. (Yes, it would have been smarter to start on groomed slopes, but I couldn't resist an invitation to join friends in the Wyoming wilderness. Plus, since I already knew how to ski, how hard could it be, right?)

Now I'm at the top of the slope, trying to shake the vision

of doing the splits, and remember some basics: Face downhill, just like in alpine skiing. Weight your skis equally for better control. Think of the knee bend like a curtsey—make it graceful.

I slide downhill and tentatively bend my knee, putting pressure on the ski's edge and . . . I'm turning. OK, it's a slow-motion turn, and my shallow dip wouldn't be recognized as a curtsey in finishing school. And I lose control of my other ski and bail out of the turn before it's finished. Elegant? No. But also, no splits.

I link three more baby turns and think, *This isn't too bad.* The semi-success gives me the confidence to try a more aggressive turn. I have no choice, really. The slope steepens below me, turning from beginner-friendly green into a legit blue run. I gain momentum and the thin layer of powder billows around my ankles. Time to turn. I bend my right knee, dipping more deeply this time. And my rear ski, the key to holding an edge and turning, starts fishtailing like a race car on wet pavement. I try to put more weight on my other ski to compensate. Big mistake.

The result is not pretty. I tumble down the slope in a tangle of poles, skis, arms, and legs.

I get up, put myself together, and try again. And crash, spectacularly, again. And again.

At the bottom, we look back up at the tracks we left, as backcountry skiers like to do. The others left swooping S-lines, as elegant as the turns they made. My track looks like it was made by a bulldozer with a drunk at the controls.

Besides being graceful, telemarking is known for being a great workout. And on the next lap, I can feel the effects in leg muscles I didn't even know I had. To state the obvious: Being tired is not good for technique. I don't dip deeply enough, which means I don't weight my turning ski sufficiently. I don't fall on every turn, but I can't say I'm getting better. Instead of improving, I start bringing my feet together to make an alpine turn when I feel my tele turn self-destructing. It's not ideal with cable bindings, but it works.

And then it dawns on me: It's a beautiful day in the mountains, the snow is great, and I already *know* how to ski.

On the next lap, I lean back a bit to keep my heels stable and make alpine turns all the way down. It may not be graceful, but it sure is fun.

THE VERDICT

FAIL

I was never going to master telemarking the first day, but I abandoned the effort too soon. Instead of getting frustrated, I should have moved to mellower terrain and kept trying.

TELE 101

Give yourself a fighting chance with these tips.

1. Rent or borrow good gear. Don't try to learn with your uncle's old leather boots. You want plastic boots and modern bindings (there are several types) that are secure. Use a shorter, softer ski if possible.

2. Choose a nice day—sunny, mild—for your first attempt so you're not battling the weather, too.

3. Go to a resort and practice on easy groomers. That makes it easier to learn, and you'll get more practice runs without having to skin up.

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Hearty Soups & Stews

Warm up with these easy one-pot meals.

By Trail Chef Jennifer Bowen



Cheddar Corn Chowder with Bacon

This classic comfort food is quick to throw together from easy-to-find pantry ingredients. 2 servings

1 1/2 cups freeze-dried corn
1 tsp granulated onion
1/4 tsp black pepper
1/4 cup bacon bits
1 small red potato, about the size of a tennis ball
2 Tbsp butter
3/4 cup pre-shredded cheddar cheese

AT HOME → Pack corn, onion, pepper, and bacon in a zip-top bag. Wrap potato in a paper towel (to avoid bruising). Pack butter in a leakproof container and cheese in a zip-top bag.

IN CAMP → Add 4 cups water to a large pot. Cut potato into 1/2-inch or smaller chunks and add to pot. Bring to a boil, then reduce to simmer, keeping pot covered. Cook for 5 minutes, then add contents of corn bag and butter and stir constantly until corn is fully hydrated and potatoes are well cooked, about 10 minutes. Whisk in the cheese with a fork.



Chicken Tortilla Soup

This Southwest classic will soothe your taco craving. 2 servings

7 oz. packet chicken breast sandwich-size bag filled with tortilla chips (it's OK if they break)
1 small, underripe Roma tomato
3 oz. pepper jack cheese
1 tsp granulated onion
1/4 tsp cumin powder
1/2 cup freeze-dried black beans (such as Fantastic Foods)
2 chicken bouillon cubes



AT HOME → Wrap tomato in a paper napkin, then in a small paper bag. Pack the cheese in a zip-top baggie. Combine onion powder, cumin, beans, and bouillon in a baggie.

IN CAMP → Cut cheese into 1/2-inch cubes. Divide the chips and cheese between two deep bowls (or save some to sprinkle on top). Dice tomato and set aside. In a large pot, bring 4 cups of water to a boil, then reduce to a simmer. Using a fork, whisk in the bean mixture, then add the chicken (no need to drain) and tomato. Simmer for 3 to 5 minutes, until the beans are fully hydrated. Pour into bowls, then let sit for about 2 minutes so the cheese melts on the chips at the bottom.



Miso Noodle Soup with Tofu

This Japanese-inspired soup is more filling than the version that's served in sushi restaurants. Bonus: Miso packs tons of flavor and is a complete protein. 2 servings

1/4 cup dried shitake mushrooms, broken into small pieces
1 sheet nori, cut into 1/2-inch ribbons
6 oz. udon noodles, broken in half
12 oz. box shelf-stable extra-firm tofu
2 Tbsp white miso paste
2 packets soy sauce (optional)

AT HOME → Combine mushrooms, nori, and noodles in a bag. Pack miso in a small plastic container or zip-top bag.

IN CAMP → Drain tofu and cut into 1-inch cubes. Add noodle packet to 4 cups water and bring to a boil, then reduce to simmer. Blend in half of the miso (pro move: to avoid clumps, scoop about 1/4 cup of liquid into a small cup, stir in miso, then pour back into pot), then taste the broth, as miso pastes can vary in saltiness. Add more miso to taste. Stir every few minutes, keeping lid partly over the top of the pot in between stirs. When noodles are slightly firm (about 6 to 8 minutes), add tofu and cook 1 to 2 minutes until noodles are done. If too much liquid evaporates, just add a little bit of water; bring it back to a boil, then lower the temperature to a simmer again. Top with soy sauce, if desired.



RECIPES TO GO

Download dozens of awesome recipes to your Nook, Kindle, iPad, or smartphone via our e-books: backpacker.com/ebooks.

Tomato Soup with Grilled Cheese

Dehydrated tomato powder makes an incredibly easy, tasty soup that pairs perfectly with gooey grilled cheese. 2 servings

3/4 cup tomato powder (like Harmony Foods)
2 tsp brown sugar
1/4 tsp dill
1/2 tsp granulated onion
2 tsp chicken bouillon powder
1 stick unsalted butter
4 slices sturdy sourdough bread
1 tsp garlic powder
2 slices provolone cheese
2 slices Swiss cheese
2 slices mozzarella cheese

AT HOME → Combine tomato powder, brown sugar, dill, onion, and bouillon in a baggie.

IN CAMP → Add 1 cup water to a pot. Whisk in tomato mixture with a fork and heat over a medium flame, gradually whisking in another cup water. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and cook until soup thickens, about 5 minutes. Add about half the butter. Meanwhile, butter each slice of bread generously (use the other half-stick; perfect for staying fueled in cold conditions), then sprinkle with garlic powder. With the butter side out, layer the cheese in the middle to make two sandwiches. Place the sandwiches in a skillet and cook over medium flame, turning once, until the bread is golden brown and cheese melts (about 2 to 3 minutes on each side).



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survival

out alive:
hanging on

As I flailed for anything to help slow my fall, my water bottle flew out the pocket of my daypack. I didn't hear it land.



April Meads, 19, slipped down a cliff in Oregon's Columbia River Gorge and was rescued with an improvised rope in May 2015.

*As told to
Catherina Leipold*



I LOOKED OVER MY RIGHT SHOULDER FOR ANYTHING THAT COULD STOP ME. ALL I SAW WAS MORE CLIFF, MORE SPEED. THEN ONE THOUGHT SLICED THROUGH THE FAST-MOTION BLUR UNFOLDING AROUND ME: *MY LIFE IS ABOUT TO END.*

A few hours earlier, my sister Stacy and I had set out on a warm spring day to hike the Triple Falls Trail, a moderate route in the Columbia River Gorge outside Portland. On the way up, we'd climbed over a tree that had fallen across the crumbly path, and we marked this place as a waypoint for our return trip: Once we passed the tree, we knew it would take an hour or so to get back down to the trailhead. We hiked past steep cliffs and dense stands of trees and lunched at Triple Falls. On the way back, we walked for what seemed like a very long time, expecting to see the fallen tree any minute.

We rounded a bend and, finally, there it was—by now I was hot and ready to go home. At the same time, we crossed paths with a man and a child. I stepped aside to make room for them, my eyes still glued to the tree.

I don't remember exactly how, but suddenly I was sliding down. Fast. I slid on my left side for 10 feet or so, looking over my right shoulder. As I flailed for anything to help slow my fall, my water bottle flew out the pocket of my daypack. I didn't hear it land. I rolled onto my stomach and started clawing at the cliff. After another 10 feet or so, somehow I managed to grab onto a very thin tree branch and stopped myself. It looked like it would snap as soon as I bent it. My heart was beating madly but I didn't dare move for fear that I would start sliding again. I glanced up at my sister and her face was all pale and it looked like she was going to throw up. She was looking down, at the sheer drop-off below me, and I knew she was trying to find a way to pull me up. I felt limp.

After a 10-second eternity, the thin branch snapped and I started to slide again. I didn't scream or yelp. I slid in complete silence, trying to remain calm and save myself. I clawed at the cliff again and surprised myself when I found my hands stacked on top of each other, clinging to a root the width of my thumb. My arms were stretched straight overhead, and I found a place to brace my left knee. I kicked my toe into a crumbly part of the cliff.

"Someone come help me!" I yelled at the top of my lungs. Once it sank in that I was hanging from a root, I slowly looked down. I swallowed hard as I saw nothing but small bushes on the cliff that descended straight down at my waist. I knew the ground was far away. My breaths grew shallow and short.

I heard my sister talking frantically to a 9-1-1 operator, but my mind drifted. I thought about the big moments and memories in my life: high school graduation, my last season of track, my family and friends. Then I felt my thoughts turn negative: I can't hold myself up. I will fall. Stacy is going to see her little sister die today.

It was hot, and my hands were starting to sweat. Above, my sister was balancing words of encouragement to me with spurts of frustration to the four dispatchers whose calls kept dropping. My neck started to hurt from looking up at the path, so I took to closing my eyes or staring straight at the cliff in front of me.

After about 30 minutes, a crowd gathered on the trail above and I saw a man climbing down toward me. Then a rope made of raincoats, sweatpants, and other clothing fell down from above, hurling loose rocks and dirt toward my face. *What is he doing?* I thought. Then: *Oh, he's risking his life to try to save mine.* The combination of weakness and relief compelled me to yell up at my sister, "Stacy, I love you so much." I heard her crying, and

that's when my attitude changed: *I can't let my sister down.* I used that as motivation to access strength I didn't know I had. It became about so much more than just holding on; it was about staying strong for Stacy. I took some deep breaths, and I held on, and I waited.

The man climbing down to me wasn't from a search-and-rescue team—I know because I'd been asking Stacy every 30 seconds if rescuers were on the way, but they weren't on the trail yet. "Thank you so much, you are the most amazing man I have ever met. I love you for doing this," I told him again and again as he got nearer,

April Meads tried to ease her fear with humor when she was hanging by a root. "Track and field didn't prepare me for this," she called up to her rescuers.



lowering himself with the aid of the improvised rope.

He told me his name was Wim. He had found a little ledge sticking out of the cliff, 4 or 5 feet to my side. Holding onto a tree with one hand, he leaned and looped the rope around me, tying a one-handed knot. I hesitated, but trusting the knot on a makeshift rope was my only option.

Wim pointed out a spot on the ledge next to him and told me to step. I got my leg over, but the part that I stepped on crumbled and fell. My stomach surged into my throat, but Wim grabbed onto my right arm, and the others above pulled on the rope at the same time. I made it onto his ledge.

My legs started shaking so hard that I could hardly hold myself up. Wim calmly explained the plan to me, then he pushed me up from below as I pulled myself up the rope, struggling through the bushes. I climbed up about 15 feet to a woman named Sarah, who took my backpack. A chunk of steep cliff still separated me from my sister. Someone had shown up with a thin rope, and Sarah and her husband, Adam, looped it through trees and then down to me. Wim climbed up behind me and I used his knee as a booster, and Adam and another man grabbed my arms and hoisted me to safety.

I crawled along the path exhausted for a few seconds, until a woman pulled me to my feet. I walked as fast as my shaky legs would let me and threw myself into Stacy's arms. That's when my tears finally fell.

*Attempting to rescue someone with an improvised rope or other tool not designed for the task is questionable, of course. (See below for tips on assessing a situation.) But April Mead's rescuers deemed the situation so dire that they took the risk. They were part of the Mazamas Climbing Group, based in Portland. They learn rescue skills and embark on weekly hikes. April hopes to join them in their training soon. **Info** mazamas.org*



KNOW WHEN TO ATTEMPT A RESCUE

ASK YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS BEFORE BEING A HERO.

1. Am I putting myself at risk?

It's only worth the attempt if you're not putting yourself in harm's way. "Know your abilities, and know your limits," says Jeff Sparhawk of Rocky Mountain Rescue. (Obviously Wim decided that April's immediate danger outweighed his personal risk in this situation.)

good (though Good Samaritan laws protect bystanders who try to give reasonable help).

3. How acute is the situation?

Left unchecked, grievous wounds or tenuous situations can progress rapidly, sometimes leading to loss of life or limb.

2. Do I actually know how to help?

Search-and-rescue teams receive lots of training; well-meaning Samaritans can sometimes do more harm than

4. How far is help?

The farther from the trailhead, the more you're expected to do. Even a sprained ankle can become life-threatening if it occurs deep in the backcountry.



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WARM YOUR HANDS

You'd be hard-pressed to make a life-saving fire with numb fingers. Wear socks like mittens to prevent frostbite and restore critical dexterity.

GET WATER

Can't find anything to drink? Fill a sock with mud or wet clay, or sop up dew, then wring out every drop of moisture into a cup or your mouth. You can also filter dirty water, removing sediment. (This makes the water more palatable, but doesn't remove bacteria and other microorganisms).

MAKE A DEAD-MAN ANCHOR

In winter, it may be hard to secure a shelter against

dangerously strong winds. Fill a sock with snow, tie your guyline to it, and bury it about a foot deep. Pack snow on top to create an anchor. This technique works well with sand, too.

DRESS A WOUND

Hopefully you have a spare clean sock for this. But if you need to control severe bleeding, you use what you have.

IMPROVISE TRACTION

To prevent slipping on slick ice, pull a sock over the toe of your boot. The sock fibers adhere to ice,

improving traction. (Wool is stickier than nylon and polyester materials.)

CARRY THINGS

It's a poor substitute for a backpack, true, but if you need to transport food or other essentials, a sock will do in a pinch. Tie it to your belt.

MAKE A HUNTING WEAPON

Starving? Stuff a sock with stones to create a "nunchuk" for clubbing small game.

PROCESS ACORNS

These wild nuts can be an easy source of calories in a survival situation, but they contain tannic acid, which tastes terrible and will make you sick to your stomach. Fill a sock with crushed acorn nuts (remove shells), tie it off, and secure it in a creek. The flowing water will remove the acid in a few days. If you have a pot and plenty of fuel or firewood, you can speed this process by soaking the nuts in hot water (change the water several times).

den mother



You want full-coverage sunglasses for sun-and-snow conditions. Find reviews of the top models at backpacker.com/shades.

Blinded by the Light

Protect your eyes from sun and snow.

When do I need to worry about snow blindness? If it happens to me, then what?

—Barry O'Rourke, via email

→ In bright sun, any part of your body can burn and blister—even your corneas. Of course you're not silly enough to ignore your ma's advice and stare straight into the sun, but if you're walking on fresh snow or ice, you might as well be holding a mirror under your chin. All those damaging UV rays get bounced around toward your eyeballs, and can result in a kind of (usually) temporary damage known as snow blindness.

Like a sunburn that doesn't show up 'til nighttime, your vision might not be affected until several hours after you scorched your eyes. You'll know you've done it good by the headachey, teary, and red-eyed feeling you can't shake. (Despite the name, snow blindness refers to vision-impairing pain, not just loss of eyesight, which is rare.) You might also get a gritty feeling, as if you've got sand in your eyes—that's the cells of your cornea drying out.

Don't try to squint through it lest you make the scarring permanent. Instead, pop some vitamin I and protect your eyes from the sun. If your vision starts to go blurry or dark, hunker down and try not to panic—snow blindness usually clears up within 36 hours. If you can't wait, knot a bandana around your eyes (or just keep them closed)

and have a buddy lead you to safety.

But prevention is easier: Pick up some wraparound shades that block at least 98 percent of incoming UV. And if you forgot 'em, cut two slits eye-width apart in cardboard, folded-over duct tape, tree bark, or anything else you can tie around your face. Pay special mind at high altitudes: Every thousand feet, UV radiation grows about 4 percent more intense. Don't let your guard down on cloudy days; UV can burn right through and get you just as good as on a clear day.

Are people with light-colored eyes more prone to snow blindness?

—Sarah Martensen, via email

→ Baby blues served Sinatra just fine in the limelight, but in blasting sun, light colored eyes are a liability because they are less resilient against UV damage. Under the same conditions, those with light-colored eyes may experience more of an impediment to their vision than folks with darker peepers. That doesn't mean brown-eyed folks don't need to be careful, though. Like I said, snow blindness creeps up on you and you won't know the full impact of the damage until some hours after the fact.

Got a question for Den Mother? Email it to denmother@backpacker.com.



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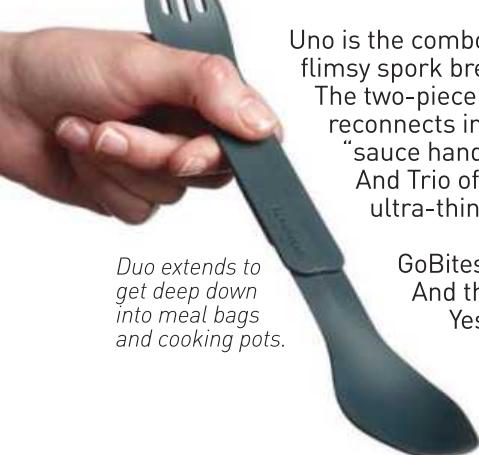
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50PAGE
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Umpqua Rock Creek Chest Pack

This chest pack is small and compact enough to take backpacking, yet it's the most comfortable we've ever tried, thanks to the supportive yoke that eliminates chafing at the shoulders. It measures 5 by 9 by 3.5 inches, but holds more than you'd think: a big fly box, tippet spools, and more. **\$60; 9 oz.; umpqua.com**

[ULTRALIGHTER]

Hummingbird Single Hammock

Stocking
Stuffer

If it's not the lightest hammock in the world, it's close. But it's got heavyweight comfort. One tester snoozed peacefully for 18 nights in the Amazon. Made from super-strong parachute nylon, it supports up to 300 pounds. Best of all, it packs down to tennis ball-size, so if you've been thinking about trying hammock-camping, you've got little to lose packing this on your next trip. **\$75; 5.2 oz.; hummingbirdhammocks.com**

MORE GIFTS!

WE HAVE TOO MANY IDEAS TO FIT HERE. GO TO BACKPACKER.COM/GIFTGUIDE FOR DOZENS MORE.

holiday gift guide

\$80 to \$150



[EVERYONE]

Duckworth Polaris Tunnel Hoody

One of these wear-everywhere hoodies is a great gift. But two would be the ultimate in thoughtfulness—that's how much you'll use the Polaris. The Montana-raised and processed merino is knit into an open-weave, waffle-patterned fabric that regulates your body temperature extremely well in temps up to about 60°F. We wore it as a cold-weather baselayer and, just as often, a light midlayer. The relaxed fit and hoodie style work everywhere. \$120; 8 oz. (w's M); duckworthco.com

[WINTER RUNNER/
SKI-TOURER]

Rab Paradox Pull-on

Ideal for anyone who loves to blaze around the mountains in winter, the Paradox is a chameleon: breathable under a shell, yet warm as a stand-

alone in mild temps. Made with Polartec Alpha insulation sandwiched between layers of knit polyester, it served us well during Colorado ski tours and mountain runs, but also around spring campfires. Stripped of pockets and fancy closures, this streamlined, half-zip sweater squishes down to grapefruit size. \$150; 13 oz. (L); rab.equipment

[DAYHIKER]
L.L.Bean Day
Trekker 25 Pack

With suspension chops to handle 20 pounds, a great pocket layout, and a unique Boa compression system that stabilizes any load, this pack will please the dayhiker on your list. It's also great for globetrotting through airports, train stations, and cities. \$129; 2 lbs.; llbean.com

[KIDS]

Selk'bag USA Marvel Bag

"The ultimate!" pronounced our 10-year-old tester after climbing into this sack. It has arms and legs and removable booties for walking, er, running, around. He put it on two hours before bedtime and didn't take it off until an hour after waking up. You don't get the insulating properties of a mummy, but you do get Marvel superhero patches, which our tester deemed a more than fair trade. He slept fine in the 40s. Yes, they come in adult sizes, too. \$99; 2 lbs. 2 oz. (M); selkbagusa.com

ANNUAL
NATIONAL
PARKS PASS

Get one for yourself while you're at it. \$80; nps.gov

THE NORTH FACE
THERMOBALL
BOOTIES

Unlike many, these warm booties have a real sole, so you can wear them around camp without slipping or getting wet. \$80; thenorthface.com

SNOW PEAK
TITANIUM
CURVED FLASK

If a flask can be sexy, this is it. \$150; 2.5 oz.; snowpeak.com

[GIFT THAT KEEPS GIVING]
Cairn Gift Subscription

Each month you get a new box of surprises (with a retail value of up to \$40), tailored specifically to your outdoor tastes. One month it might be a hammock, socks, sunscreen, and a compass. The next month, perhaps a headlamp, water bottle, energy bar, and first-aid kit. Half the fun is the surprise. 6 months for \$150 (other plans available); getcairn.com

Over \$150



[ULTRALIGHTER]

Big Agnes Copper Spur UL2 mtnGLO

It has fortress-like protection at bare-minimum weight, but now we love this tent even more because of its integrated lighting system. Double doors and vestibule, plus a 42-inch peak height, make this sub-3-pound tent easy to live in. **\$450; 2 lbs. 14 oz.;** bigagnes.com



[FITNESS FANATIC]

Apple Watch

Know someone who is training for a big hike? The built-in heart rate monitor and workout tracking make it easy to incorporate training with daily chores (calls, emails, and texts). Great for dayhikes, but don't stray far from power: It needs recharging after a day of use. **\$349 and up;** apple.com

TSL SYMBIOZ ELITE SNOWSHOES The flexible frames allow max contact with the slope and unbeatable traction. **\$299; 4 lbs. 2 oz.;** tslsnowshoes.com

EXCALIBUR 5-TRAY

CLEAR DOOR W/ TIMER

Make your own five-star backpacking meals (see page 36 for tips) with this dehydrator. **\$270;** excaliburdehydrator.com



WOOLRICH TRAIL BLANKET

Support your favorite trail (AT, CDT, or PCT) with the purchase of these cozy blankets. **\$185;** woolrich.com

[WINTER WARRIOR]

Seek Outside 8p Teepee with Titanium Woodstove XL

This gigantic, 8.5-foot-tall silnylon cone let four men on a gear-heavy expedition in Minnesota lounge about without so much as touching each other (see photo page 86). The two doors are walk-in tall, so no more slithering into a tiny entrance. Best feature: the titanium woodstove. It sets up in a few minutes, accepts logs up to 14 inches long (an easy size to break), and pumps out enough heat to hang out in midlayers on nights in the single digits. Tradeoff: This kind of winter shelter isn't cheap. Teepee: **\$919; 6 lbs. 5 oz. Stove: \$445; 3 lbs. 10 oz.;** seekoutside.com

[COLD FOOTED]
Sidas Pro Heat Set

Eliminate frigid toes with the push of a button—literally. This insole slides neatly into ski boots and hiking boots (in place of standard insoles) and connects to a pack-of-gum-size power pack via a flat, barely-there cord; string the cord from your heel to the ankle cuff of your boot and lash the power pack with its attachment point. When your feet are cold, press the single, glove-friendly button on the power pack and cycle through low, medium, and high heat. Unlike other boot heaters, the warming elements in the insole extend from the heel to the toes for even heating. Get 12 hours of heat on low, or four on high. **\$340; 9 oz. (22.5) per pair;** sidassport.com



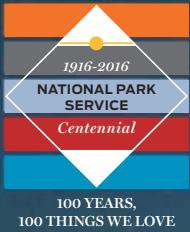
HELLE HARDING

It's a work of art that cuts salami, too. **\$149; 3.6 oz.;** helle.com



[BASECAMPER]
Exped MegaMat 10 LXW

This pad is massive (78 by 30 by 4 inches), and it's massively comfortable. With a thick slab of open-cell foam in the middle, the Mega is warm down to bone-cracking temps (-54°F). Though you'll need a different pad for backpacking (it's heavy and bulky), you'll be the happiest person in any basecamp. **\$219; 5 lbs. 8 oz.;** exped.com



100 YEARS.
100 THINGS WE LOVE

ENDLESS SUMMER

*Pack the sunscreen for these national parks,
where you can escape the cold and the crowds.*

BY ELISABETH KWAK-HEFFERAN



A photograph of a tent on a sandy beach at night. The tent is a dark, dome-shaped model with a light-colored flysheet. It is positioned on the left side of the frame, facing towards the right. The beach is sandy and appears to be quite wide. In the background, there is a body of water and a distant, dark shoreline with some trees or bushes. The sky is a deep, dark blue, filled with numerous stars of varying sizes. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and suggests a camping trip in a natural, remote setting.

Find this winter-perfect slice of
heaven on Rabbit Key in Everglades
National Park, Florida (turn the page
for details).

DON'T BE ASHAMED

Not everyone loves winter weather. It's OK. Some members of our tribe would rather build a sand castle than a snow cave. For the cold-averse among us, there's a host of national parks that come into their own during the fourth season. Swap your parka for a sun hat and hit the trails, rivers, and sweet, sugar-sand beaches for a different kind of national park adventure.

54 OF #NPS100

Paddle Through a Zoo

SWEETWATER BAY CHICKEE-RABBIT KEY LOOP, EVERGLADES NP, FL

Blue-haired snowbirds aren't the only ones flocking to south Florida in winter. The dry season's warm, lower-humidity conditions also attract actual birds by the thousands. And dropping water levels concentrate freshwater alligators in the remaining waterholes, making winter prime time for a wildlife-spotting expedition. Find the best option in the park's Ten Thousand Islands area on this 43.5-mile, five-day loop linking inland swamps and gulf beaches. From Everglades City, paddle 9 miles southeast and up the Lopez River to Crooked Creek Chickee, a covered tent platform hovering over the water on stilts. Day two, hop on the inland Wilderness Waterway, a 99-mile route through mangrove swamps, open bays, and sawgrass prairie connected by wide rivers and narrow forest tunnels. Follow it 10 miles to Sweetwater Bay Chickee, near a freshwater zone where gators bask on sunny streambanks. Then paddle the Chatham River to Pavilion Key (11.5 miles; time your trip to match the outgoing tide), then Rabbit Key (another 4 miles), both white-sand beach sites on the Gulf of Mexico where chances for glimpsing white pelicans, bald eagles, and dolphins are high. You might also see sea turtles and manatees in the grasses off Rabbit Key, especially closer to spring. Head back to Everglades City via Chokoloskee Pass on an incoming tide. One animal sighting you don't want: raccoons raiding your dinner. Store food in a kayak compartment or hard-sided cooler. **Average January high/low** 78°F/54°F **Dry season** December to April **Permit** Pick up at Gulf Coast Visitor Center; \$15 plus \$2/person/day **Kayak rentals** evergladesnationalparkboattours-gulfcoast.com **Info** nps.gov/ever

In the Everglades, look for American alligators in shallow, freshwater swamps and lakes.



PHOTOS BY (FROM LEFT) PAUL MARCELLINI / TANDEMSTOCK.COM; JOE CARINI / PACIFIC STOCK / AURORA PHOTOS

THE FIRST 100 YEARS

Let the fire fall!
For nearly 100 years beginning in 1872, that simple command initiated the nightly Yosemite Firefall, which saw park staff push smoldering bonfire embers off the edge of Glacier Point at 9 p.m. The fiery ash plummeted 3,200 feet to the valley floor, creating a glowing cascade visible for miles. It was the stuff of Smokey Bear's nightmares, but visitors reveled in the popular spectacle and trampled meadows in huge numbers to watch. Despite public opposition, the park finally ended the Firefall in 1968, citing environmental impacts.

—Trent Knoss



Mt. 'Alava stands tall over Pago Pago Harbor.

53 OF #NPS100

Explore a South Pacific Paradise

MT. 'ALAVA, NATIONAL PARK OF AMERICAN SAMOA

You want exotic? You'll have to think past Hawaii—2,500 miles past, to American Samoa, the uncontested champion of the system's tropical getaways. Yes, it's everything you imagine: Thickly rainforested peaks rising above white-sand beaches, fruit bats with 3-foot wingspans flitting among the lush trees. Head to Tutuila island and up 1,610-foot Mt. 'Alava for the park's best view. From Fagasa Pass, trace a ridgeline for 3.5 miles, beneath banyan and fig trees alive with the calls of tropical seabirds, to reach the summit, where views extend down to the glittery blue Pago Pago Harbor (pictured). Connect to the Mt. 'Alava Adventure Trail and continue 2.5 miles (shimmy down a series of rope ladders) to tiny Vatia Village. Continue 1.1 miles on the Tuafanua Trail to a secluded beach where red-footed boobies fish and butterflyfish dart among coral reefs (you'll have to come back in summer to snorkel here, though—winter's rip currents make swimming sketchy). Backtrack or (better yet) arrange for a homestay with a family in Vatia. **Average January high/low** 87°F/78°F **Season** Year-round **Info** nps.gov/npsa

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Hit the Beach

GARDEN KEY, DRY TORTUGAS NP, FL

We'd forgive you for parking it in the sand upon arrival at the primitive Garden Key campground. For one, you've just reached the end of a long journey, capped by a two-hour boat ride into the Gulf of Mexico. And for two, the palm-shaded refuge in the shadows of a 19th-century military outpost is the kind of place where sunbathing, fishing for tarpon and bonefish, and snorkeling can tie up entire weeks. But you came all this way. So buck up, slide into your flip-flops, and kayak 3 miles west to Loggerhead Key, the largest of the seven Dry Tortugas islands (BYO kayak; for experienced paddlers only). Snorkel the 22,000-square-foot Little Africa Reef on the key's western side or check out the Windjammer shipwreck off the southern tip. Return to Garden Key to camp. No kayak? Park yourself on that beach after all. **Average January high/low** 75°F/65°F **Dry season** November to May **Camping** First-come, first-serve; \$3/person/night **Ferry** \$195/person if camping/\$175 for day trips; (prices are round-trip and ferry leaves from Key West; includes two meals and snorkeling gear); drytortugas.com **Permit** Required for kayaking; free **Info** nps.gov/drt

Saguaro National Park's namesake cactus can weigh 6 tons and reach a height of 50 feet.



PHOTOS BY GREG MCCOWN, (2) AIDAN LYNN-KLIMENKO AND MADISON PERRINS

Backpack the Desert

MANNING CAMP LOOP, SAGUARO NP, AZ

The iconic, arms-aloft silhouette of the saguaro cactus conjures up the desert Southwest like few other images can. It also provides precisely zero shade, a matter of no small importance from spring into fall, when temperatures crank to broiling. In winter, though? The Saguaro Wilderness in the Rincon Mountain District offers pleasant weather in lower elevations and refreshing temps up top. Start an 11.8-mile overnight on the Douglas Spring Trail, hiking through a garden of saguaros, barrel cacti, and prickly pear that gives way to creosote and manzanita as you gain about 2,000 feet en route to the Douglas Spring campsites at mile 5.9. Descend a steep 3.5 miles to Grass Shack Camp, then head north to close the loop. (For a longer, if chillier, trip, head east into the high country from Douglas Spring via the Cow Head Saddle Trail to Manning Camp at 8,000 feet, a ponderosa pine- and juniper-covered oasis with year-round water and easy access to extensive views over Heartbreak Ridge, the Rincon Valley, and Tucson.) **Average January high/low** 60°F/35°F (Douglas Spring) **Season** February and March for warmer high-elevation weather **Permit** \$8/night **Info** nps.gov/sagu

Ply the Bayous

UPPER NECHES RIVER, BIG THICKET NATIONAL PRESERVE, TX

Deep in southeast Texas, worlds collide. Here, the South's swampy bottomlands crash into the East Coast's hardwood forests and Texas's cactus-studded plains, forming a little pocket of biodiversity where river otters, bobcats, deer, and armadillos thrive. Head to the Upper Neches River for an up-close look at the ecological melting pot: Winter, with its milder, bug-free weather and lower water levels (read: more expansive sandbar campsites), is an excellent time to go. Put in at McQueen's Landing for a three-night, 45-mile getaway. Paddle south through a hardwood forest to the park's Canyonlands Unit for night one; save time for an off-trail hike to explore the fern-decked, 30-foot-deep gullies. Next morning, continue south through cypress sloughs and scout a beach campsite on one of the plentiful sandbars. On day three, you'll paddle through a swampier thicket of sweet gum, tupelo, and pine in the Neches Bottom and Jack Gore Baygall Unit. Finish by paddling another 12 miles to your takeout at the US 96 bridge. **Average January high/low** 60°F/40°F **Season** February to April for better water conditions and mild temps **Permit** Free camping permit required **Canoe rental** eastexcanoes.com **Info** nps.gov/bith



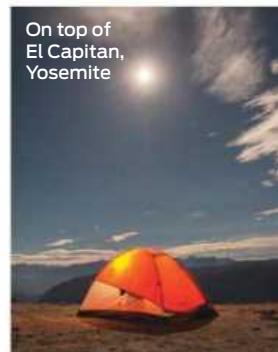
**BEST
JOB
EVER**

WASTE NOT

Our national parks centennial team, Madison Perrins and Aidan Lynn-Klimenko, spent much of the fall exploring California's iconic parks. They've had amazing adventures, but they've also learned that they—and the millions of others who visit the parks every year—can be a burden on the NPS system, simply by filling trash cans that the parks must deal with. Over the last four months and 14 parks, they've come to see how they can be part of the solution. Here are a few ways they've reduced their impact. Because taking photos like these is a lot more satisfying when you *really* leave nothing behind.

It may attract funny looks, but if we stay in park hotels, we bring our own plates and silverware to avoid using the disposable stuff at breakfast.

When grocery shopping, we often forgo bags altogether and wheel our cart to the car and load our supplies straight into the cooler.



On top of El Capitan, Yosemite

When recycling containers are not available, we don't give up. We simply tote recyclables around with us until we find a place to deposit them—and keep them out of the landfill.

Glacier Point, Yosemite



We've found that our number one waste product is food packaging. Now we choose unpackaged foods like bananas and apples, and look to buy our staples in bulk.

We use refillable water bottles. Of course.

We decline paper maps for campgrounds and (especially) hotels that are useful for all of two minutes.

Learn more about the effort to eliminate trash in Yosemite, Denali, and Grand Teton National Parks at subaru.com/environment.

For updates, photos, and videos from our NPS Centennial Team, go to backpacker.com/NPS100.

Get Lost

BACKCOUNTRY LOOP, WHITE SANDS NATIONAL MONUMENT, NM

Big, stark, and dazzlingly bright, White Sands is like a winter wonderland minus the snow. You can even go sledding (pick up a waxed plastic saucer at the gift shop). But nighttime might be the real show-stopper. Snag a permit for one of the 10 dunefield campsites and get ready for bedazzling stars or a moon so bright it turns the sand to silver. And because the monument closes to day visitors at sunset, backpackers on the Backcountry Loop get the celestial show all to themselves. Hit the 2.2-mile loop winding up and down the dunefield's 40-foot-tall gypsum mounds. Pitch your tent, then climb the nearest dune to watch the Milky Way, the Andromeda galaxy, and approximately one bajillion stars twinkle into view. Pack all water on this dry route. **Average January high/low 57°F/22°F** **Season** October to April for milder temps **Permit** Pick up in person up to one hour before sunset at the visitor center; \$3/person **Info** nps.gov/whsa

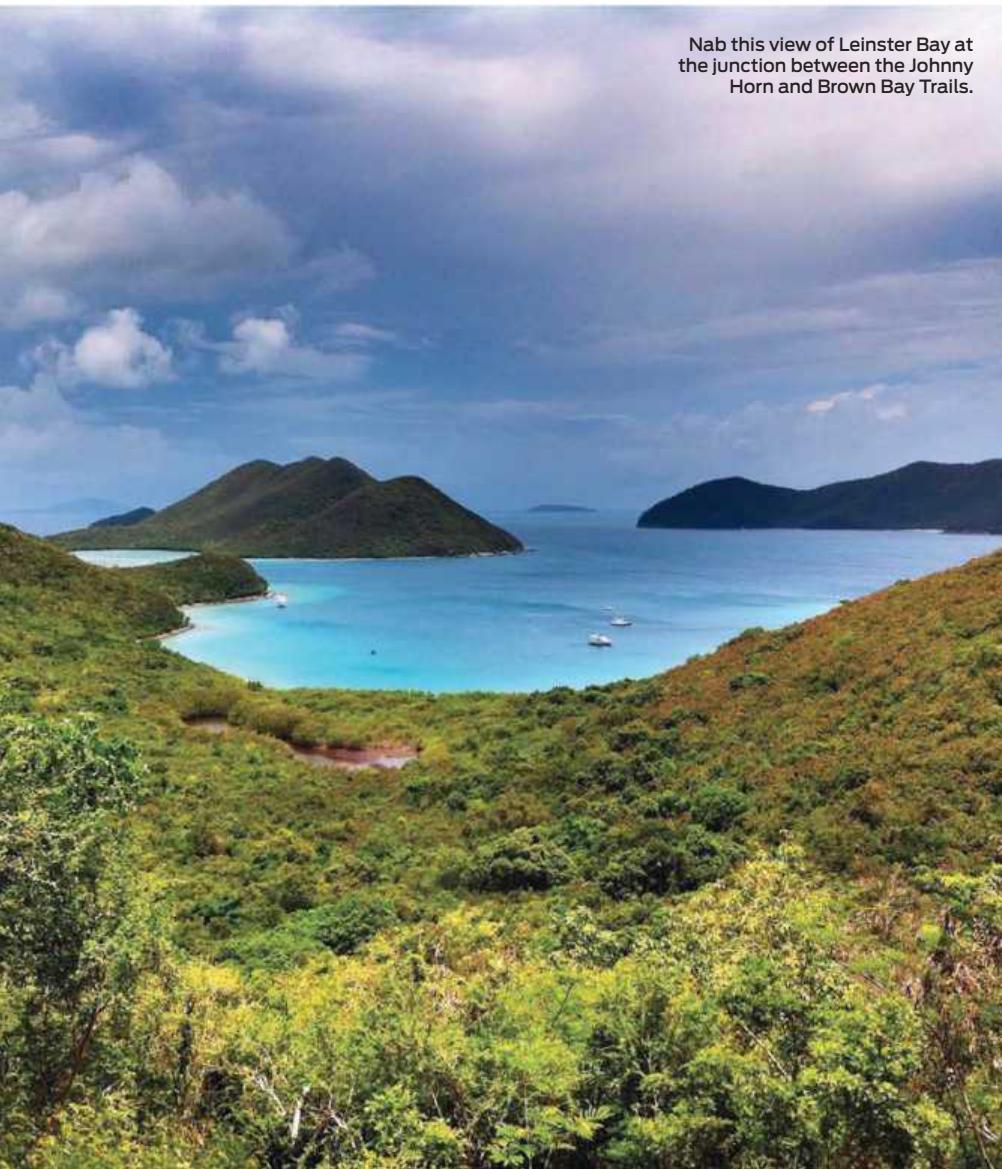
A wide-angle photograph of a vast gypsum dunefield at sunset. The dunes are numerous, rolling hills of light-colored sand that transition from blue to orange and red as the light hits them. In the distance, a lone figure stands on a sand dune, appearing as a small red dot against the vast landscape. The sky is a warm, orange-yellow color, and the overall scene is one of vastness and tranquility.

At 275 square miles, White
Sands is the largest gypsum
dunefield in the world.

Hike, Swim, and Snorkel the Caribbean

REEF BAY & BROWN BAY, VIRGIN ISLANDS NP

Yes, the above-sea level view on St. John is something out of a honeymoon brochure. But you'd be missing half the point if you never stuck your head underwater on this reef-ringed island, home to sea turtles, neon-bright fish, and 50 species of coral (including seven that are threatened). Best plan: Basecamp at the forested Cinnamon Bay Campground just off the beach and see the best of both worlds on day trips. On dry land, hike the 2.2-mile (one-way) Reef Bay Trail, a mostly downhill path through lush kapok, bay rum, and spike-studded "monkey no climb" trees and past the remains of several 1700s Danish sugarcane plantations. (Don't miss the .3-mile spur at mile 1.5 to a panel of petroglyphs left by the Taino culture between 900 and 1400 AD.) Pop out of the forest at Reef Bay for a dip in the calm water, then backtrack. For a peek under the waves, link the Leinster Bay, Johnny Horn, and Brown Bay Trails for a 3-mile (one-way) hike past several primo snorkeling spots. At Leinster Bay and Watermelon Cay, look for cushion sea stars, turtles, and branching gorgonians (a coral relative); staghorn corals, conch, and fish are the stars at Brown Bay. With water temps a near-constant 80°F and underwater views stretching 60 feet and beyond, you might never want to dry off. **Average January high/low 82°F/70°F** **Season** Year-round **Camping** \$37/primitive campsite, \$67-\$93/platform tent; cinnamonbay.com **Snorkel gear rental** divelowkey.com **Info** nps.gov/viis



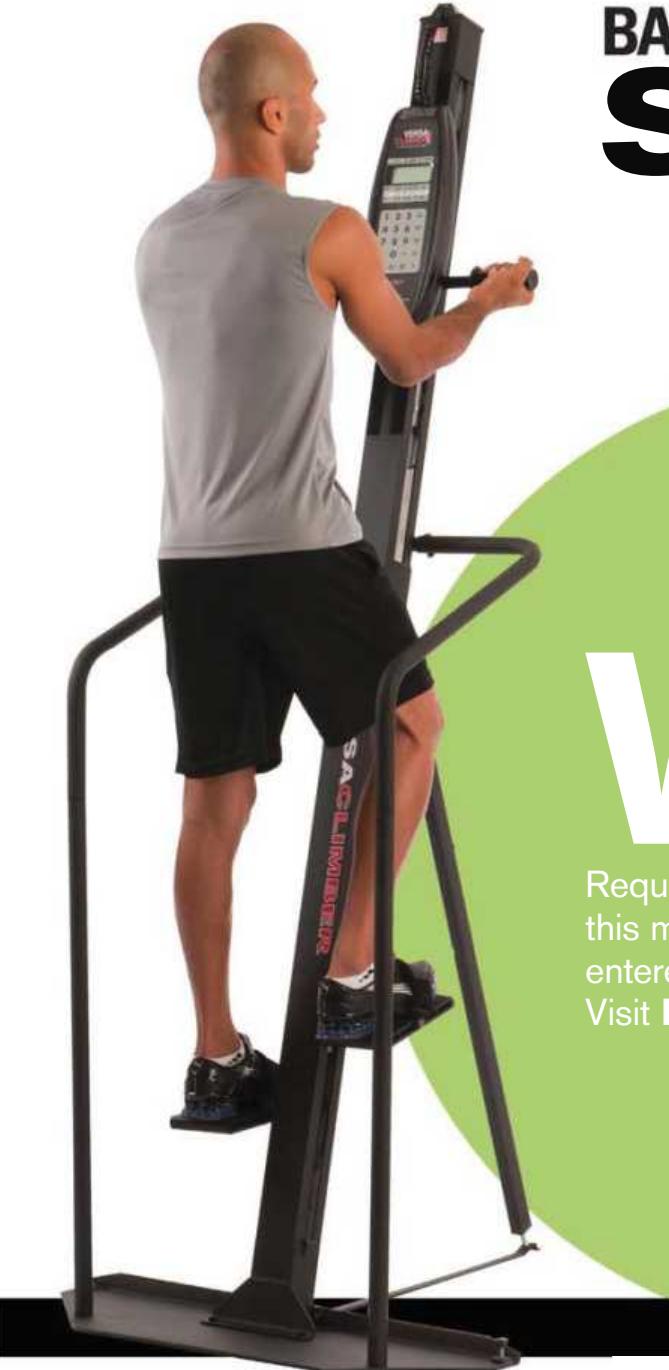
Canyonlands view of the Milky Way



THE NEXT 100 YEARS

An estimated two-thirds of the U.S. population lives in areas where it's too bright at night to see the Milky Way with the naked eye. And as urban centers grow over the next century, you can expect even more Americans to grow up in places where they can't see this iconic sight. Fortunately, the National Park Service has increasingly embraced the dark sky experience. In recent years, parks such as Acadia and Rocky Mountain have led the way in introducing more nighttime astronomy programs, ranger-led moonlight hikes, and stargazing festivals. In 2015, Canyonlands, Capitol Reef, and Black Canyon of the Gunnison were recognized as International Dark Sky Parks for their achievements in reducing artificial light pollution. In all, 30 national parks currently employ darkness monitoring technology, a number that the NPS expects to increase to 55 by the end of the decade. Up next: system-wide lightbulb retrofitting to reduce ambient glow, as well as outreach partnerships with non-profits like No Barriers Youth to stress the importance of pristine night skies to future generations—efforts that should only give visitors even more reasons to visit a park after dark.

—Trent Knoss



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The Muffin Maker

Tired of the same old camping food? Care to try something new? Bake up some fun with the Muffin Maker by Backcountry Bakery. One can make muffins, cornbread, biscuits, brownies, breads, poached eggs or just about anything else that one can think of. Try it. You won't regret it. BackcountryBakery.com

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GoBites – Trio \$13.99

The fully-featured utensil set under the new GoBites line, Trio features a knife, fork and spoon, all in an impossibly-thin case. The sharp knife can cut chicken and the fork features special "splitter tines" to cleave food. All tools made with ultra-strong nylon. Lifetime warranty. humangear.com/gobites

CAMPMOR



MSR EVO Snowshoe \$139.95

Your season of adventure doesn't end when the snow falls and temperatures drop. Shop Campmor.com for snowshoes, trekking poles, boots, gaiters and all your winter layers. The MSR EVO Snowshoe provides extreme durability, with the traction, stability and adaptability necessary for use on varied terrain. Campmor.com

Spyderco



Native 5 Lightweight \$139.95

The Spyderco Native® 5 Lightweight is proudly manufactured in Golden, CO. Its linerless handle construction features injection-molded fiberglass-reinforced-nylon (FRN) with Bi-Directional Texturing™ for an improved grip and a four-position clip for ambidextrous tip-up or tip-down carry. The Native 5 features a spear point blade made from premium CPM S35VN stainless steel. Spyderco.com



Men's Shovelhead Hooded Jacket \$249.95

Our Shovelhead Hooded jacket (also available in womens) has become a fan favorite for first tracks, last call, and all the lift rides in between. With 700 fill power DownTek™ and a water repellent shell, you can add warmth to your jacket quiver without increasing bulk. The athletic fit gives you room to move freely and the insulated hood cinches tight. This is the do-it-all mid-weight insulated jacket. BigAgnes.com

TAMRON®

16-300mm All-In-One Lens \$629

Features an incredible 18.8X range that's perfect for outdoor photography. Get outstanding image quality with this incredibly compact and lightweight lens that covers 16mm wide angle to 300mm telephoto plus macro with just one lens. VC image stabilization and moisture-resistant construction round out this impressive lens designed for Canon, Nikon and Sony DSLRs. See website for mail-in rebate details. Tamron-usa.com



Spire \$29.95

The Spire's ability to easily lower a climber while in auto-block mode leads the pack in ease of use, and its right at home on your skinny alpine rope.

- › Certified for ropes from 7.5-10.7mm (optimized for ropes 8.9-9.5)
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- › Ultralight (56 grams)
- › Made in USA

smcgear.com



Colster \$29.99

Featuring heavy-duty, 18/8 kitchen-grade stainless steel for superior durability, double-wall vacuum insulation and a ThermoLock™ gasket that locks your beverage in place while keeping it cold. Plus, the No Sweat™ Design keeps your hand dry while your tasty beverage stays frosty until the last drop. YetiCoolers.com



NEW Nikwax Down Wash Direct \$11

Help keep shiny new down jackets and sleeping bags clean in the seasons to come. Nikwax Down Wash Direct makes a great stocking stuffer! It's the first down cleaning product to offer superior cleaning performance, maintain the water repellency of all treated down and improve the water repellency of regular down. Nikwaxna.com/down



Winterize Your Chalk Bag \$30

Pure Grit Climbing bags are engineered with personality. Our Boulder, Colorado made bags have distinct style, unique materials, and uncompromising quality. Choose from our diverse selection or have a one-of-kind bag custom made. PureGritClimbing.com



ACT Lite 65 +10 \$209

The light way to carry heavy weight. The Aircontract back system perfectly adapts to the wearer's back and holds the load close to the body's center of gravity. With every movement, a pump effect circulates air through the breathable hollow chamber padding to reduce perspiration. The shoulder strap construction features a bilaminar foam and an exact anatomical shape. With a purist yet technical design, the ACT Lite models are perfect companions on any backpacking trip. Deuter.com



Forearm Roller \$22.50

Offering a wide variety of NEW affordable self-care tools and tapes presented in the book Climbing Injuries Solved. A present that you both can use together to avoid pulley tendon injuries and elbow tendinitis, the guy above runs at just under \$25 for a forearm roller. Comes with a FREE palm massage ball and instructions for use. ClimbingInjuriesSolved.com





The Element

With the Element water-resistant, shockproof, dustproof solar charger clipped to your backpack or belt loop, you'll never need an electric outlet to keep your devices charged. Focus on more important things than battery percentage with this tough little powerhouse at your side. Get 10% off site-wide with code "BACKPACKER"! DawanGlobal.com



NEW Air Chair™ Compact

A lightweight, adjustable air-cushioned seat offers comfort that can go everywhere. Featuring an inflatable air pad manufactured by Klymit®, the Air Chair™ Compact inflates to 2" thick, weighs only 26 oz., and deflates to roll-up for effortless carrying on the trail or to camp. CrazyCreek.com



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Craving versatility? The Flicker delivers. With a full center zip and three temperature options, it excels as a quilt or a sleeping bag. Just in case it doesn't quite fit the bill, check out over 40 other models of down sleeping bags, all handcrafted with ethically sourced down in Seattle, Washington. FeatheredFriends.com



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For over 40 years, David Virtue has been making handcrafted jewelry in his New England workshop. His designer rings are popular wedding bands as well as every day rings worn to express his customers' lifestyles and passions. David Virtue jewelry is designed and produced using 100% recycled gold and platinum. Purchase David Virtue Jewelry on his secure website. DavidVirtue.com



bäm! hangboard \$139

By creating adjustable depth and angle holds the bäm! hangboard allows you to make fine adjustments to hold difficulty in a compact sized board. bamclimbing.com



Molo Hybrid Jacket \$89.99

This hybrid design offers mid-weight warmth without sacrificing comfort or movement. Its quilted water resistant body and fleece side panels wicks moisture. It is perfect for everyday use and keeps you warm and protected in the elements. HighSierra.com



MICROspikes®

Lighter and tougher, the new MICROspikes® deliver unrivaled traction on icy winter trails. MICROspikes® traction is tough enough to handle any adventure with stainless steel spikes and welded chains. MICROspikes® now feature an integrated toe bale and reinforced eyelets allowing for a 50% lower profile elastomer harness. Kahtoola.com



Switch Pack \$120

Wear the Switch as a messenger bag or a backpack. The choice is yours! The unique system easily converts from backpack to messenger bag in seconds. Plus there's plenty of pockets inside to organize your gear, including a dedicated padded compartment for your laptop. Bergans.com



Ozone Convertible 50L/22" \$300

If you're looking for a travel bag you can stow in the overhead compartment, wheel through the airport and throw on your back when the road gets less traveled, the Osprey Ozone 50 is your perfect travel companion. This award-winning travel pack is light-weight, durable and highly functional. OspreyPacks.com



The Orb—Deep Tissue Massage Ball \$19.95

Endorsed by Sasha DiGiulian, the Orb is the best tool for tough knots, soreness, and tight muscles! High density massage ball provides multi directional roll for a deep tissue massage. Available at REI! Pro-tecAthletics.com



K9 Dog Pack \$64.95

The perfect gift for the hiking dog owner. The 2015 K9 Dog Pack was designed with the guidance of an experienced veterinarian, leading to the most ergonomic dog pack since Mountainsmith started making them in the early 80s. Available in three adjustable sizes, the Dog Pack will allow your four-legged friend to carry their share of the load. Find more info at Mountainsmith.com






Ultra-Light Air Pad

Light and fast comfort, the Ultra-Light self-inflating air pad from ALPS Mountaineering is efficiently designed to eliminate unnecessary weight while providing comfort. The jet stream foam draws air in quickly, speeding up inflation. The Ultra-Light Air Pad is available in regular or long and comes with a repair kit.

AlpsMountaineering.com

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The ultimate cargo and trunk protection for vehicles, featuring a raised lip that contains spills. Perfect for hauling camping gear, groceries and much more; will not curl, crack, or harden even in cold weather. 800.441.6287

WeatherTech.com



Withings

Inspire health

Activité Pop \$149.95

If you're ready for an activity tracker that looks less like a big rubber band and more like a fine watch, you're ready for Activité Pop. Activity level assessment through the tracking of steps, distance running, swim session and calories expenditure. Restores sleep cycles and wakes you up with a silent alarm. No charge, 8 month battery life using classic watch button cell. Withings.com



♦ Helinox



Chair One \$99.95

Available in a variety of colors and styles, this 1.9 lb. folding camp chair packs down smaller than the Sunday Times. Utilizing anodized DAC aluminum poles, it's strong enough to support folks up to 320 lbs. It's both comfortable and stylish and you'll be psyched to have it around the campfire. BigAgnes.com



Women's Ultralight Juel Vest \$249.95

The Juel (also available in Men's Zoro Vest) is an ultralight vest designed for high performance with minimal weight (size M, 6.5 oz.) and bulk restrictions. Insulated with 850 fill power DownTek™, which absorbs less water and dries faster than untreated downs. The exterior is comprised of an ultralight nylon rip-stop shell that is both water and wind resistant. This is the go-to high insulation, feather-light layer when adventures call for saving space and weight in your pack and under your shell. BigAgnes.com



ALPS MOUNTAINEERING.

Firelight 240 Flashlight

A tool for all trips and all seasons, the Firelight 240 from ALPS Mountaineering is a rugged and powerful 240 lumen flashlight. Powered by two, easy to find AA batteries, you can expect 5 hours on high and 15 hours on low plus it features an adjustable beam from 15°-75°. AlpsMountaineering.com



Glacier Stainless 1L Vacuum Bottle \$34.95

High-performance stainless steel vacuum bottles keep your beverages hot or cold for up to 30 hours. The insulated stainless lined cup/cap protects your lips, hands and taste. And the pour-through stopper allows for easy dispensing with only a half-turn to open and securely close. GSIOutdoors.com



VERSA CLIMBER

HP VersaClimber \$2,195

Don't let your weak cardio and endurance blow it on the mountain—get fit with VersaClimber. Its effective, upright total body design, builds your mountain cardio, endurance and stamina for the slopes and high altitude. The VersaClimber's non impact, total body climbing motion, has been proven to be 2x more effective than ellipticals, spin bikes and treadmills. Train the way you play—total body. VersaClimber is proudly made in California, for 35 years. 1.800.237.2271 VersaClimber.com



Organic Stinger Waffles \$1.39

A great alternative to conventional energy foods, Organic Stinger Waffles provide a tasty boost of sustainable energy on the go with two thin waffles infused with True Source™ honey. Open one up as a mid-afternoon pick-me-up or as a way to put some get-up-and-go in your exercise routine. HoneyStinger.com



vapur.

Incognito Flexible Flask 300ML \$6.99

Meet Vapur Incognito, the flask of the 21st century. With its flexible, low-profile design, Incognito is the only way to transport your beverage after hours. With this perfect travel companion, just sip it, stash it and go! **Save 10% on everyone's new favorite stocking stuffer with code "faveflask" at Vapur.us.**



ADVENTURE AT AN AFFORDABLE COST

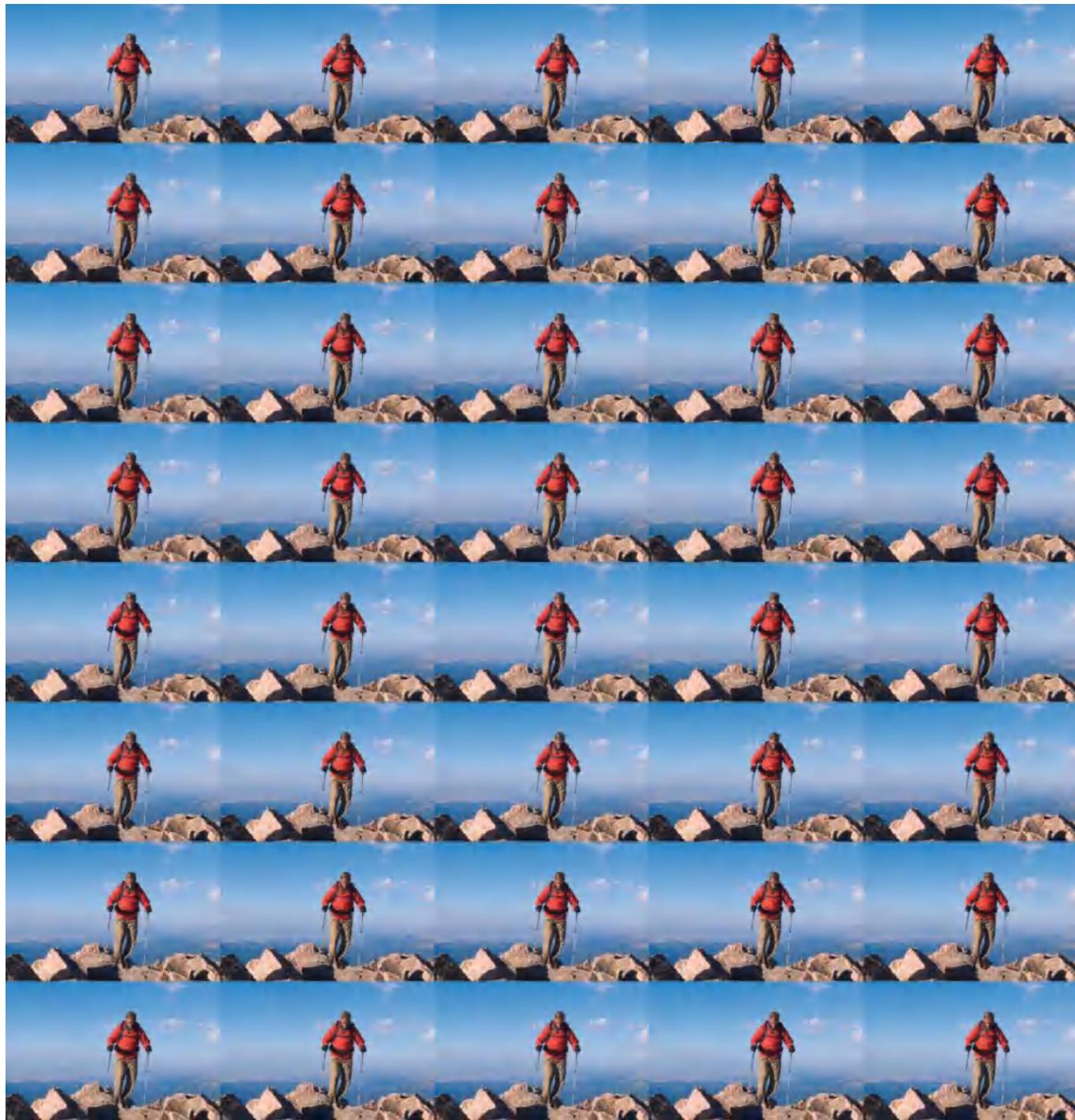
Spend a little or spend a lot: We've found

Kayaking in Washington's
San Juan Islands (see page 80)

NATURE Y

32 ways to live large on any budget.





FREE HIKE EVERY DAY FOR A MONTH

I suspect I am not the only person who, with the clock ticking toward yet another high school reunion, has passed a mirror and thought, “How did *that* happen?” Time was not on my side: I had a mere 41 days before gathering with classmates who, decades ago, would have described me as borderline malnourished.

This was a discouraging turn of physiological events. And perplexing, as I have not lived a sedentary life. (Muchas gracias, rapidly diminishing metabolism!) A mere eight-minute drive from my front door lies an extensive trail system leading into New Mexico’s massive Gila National Forest. Five or six times a week, I don my daypack and head into the hills. A couple times a month,

I go on a backpacking trip through rough country.

Yet.

With the possibility of mortification looming, I opted to up my game by setting a goal. While huffing up a decommissioned section of the Continental Divide Trail in the 8,000-foot Burro Mountains, I decided to check off each of the remaining days before my reunion with a hike. Though I’m not cut from the Fitbit cloth, I have kept a journal of my trail efforts for many years. Thus, I was painfully aware that my previous hiking record—set in the mid-1990s—sat at a paltry 21 consecutive days. Even on my thru-hikes of the Appalachian, Colorado, and

Arizona Trails, I never hiked more than 12 straight days without rest.

The ground rules were simple: It wasn't an official hike unless it lasted at least 90 minutes. It also had to transpire out in the woods. (Walking my dog, Casey, through the neighborhood did not count.)

Math majors might take note of the fact, that, if I hike five or six times a week under normal circumstances, then, in reality, this 40-day endeavor would likely add only about 10 days to a hiking schedule most people would already consider dense. The problem: beer. Too much, to be precise. I blame my half-Irish, half-English ancestry. Not surprisingly, this DNA-level inclination is often a next-day motivation killer. In order to hike for a minimum of 90 minutes for 40 straight days, I would have to overcome, or at least manage, my social proclivities for 40 straight nights.

All worthy undertakings ought to begin with a ceremony. So, on day one of my quest, I drove down the kind of rutted dirt road that defines my home range, parked next to a long-abandoned barbwire fence, and pointed my well-worn Lowas toward a peak I had seen many times from the highway but had never visited. Its summit is not lofty, but its multi-mile, cross-country approach is steep, ragged, and lined with every manner of spine-laden species of flora found hereabouts. Several hours later, while balancing on a summit scarcely large enough to accommodate a single boot, I shouted, with only a few ravens as my witnesses: "I shall do this!"

Completing the quest, now, was about honor as much as physique.

On the majority of the subsequent 40 days, I covered nearby ground. I'd rise at 5:30 a.m. and, with Casey, hit the trail by 7. On weekends, I would venture farther afoot, up into the Gila Wilderness or over into Arizona's White Mountains. My campaign slowed but did not stop when I had to limp for a few days when I twisted an ankle after being startled by a 4-foot-long, black-tail rattlesnake.

Forty days later, my wife and I carried a celebratory picnic lunch (read: Clif Bars) to a little-known waterfall. And, just like that, the quest was achieved. As I was preparing to drive to my high school reunion, I looked once again into the mirror. I was stunned to observe that the image had not changed as much as I had hoped. I had lost a couple pounds and my legs were tanned, toned, and scratched all to hell. But there was one important change: The person looking back at me boasted a big smile that seemed to ask: "What's next?" ■

M. John Fayhee is the author of 12 books, including Smoke Signals: Wayward Journeys through the Old Heart of the New West. He recently hiked for 100 straight days.

EAT BETTER

\$10

MAKE SALMON CAKES WITH GARLIC-LEMON AIOLI AND CAMPFIRE APPLES



READERS' CHOICE: YOUR TOP TRIPS FOR

\$25

"Spend a night at Woodchuck Hostel in Damascus, Virginia"

Laura Alley Muehlbrad

"Buy a backcountry permit for the Grand Canyon"

Samantha Whitehead

Thrifty backpackers, have no fear: A limited budget doesn't mean a limited palate. Say goodbye to chili mac, pizzadillas, and beans and rice—but not to your hard-earned dough. You can still get fancy for five bucks a head. **Bonus:** That fiver will buy you dessert, too.

Ingredients

½ of a 6-ounce packet instant stuffing mix (Stove Top brand is a good one)
 ½ cup mozzarella
 ¼ onion
 ½ stick butter
 10 restaurant-size mayo packets
 5-ounce packet of salmon
 1 clove garlic
 2 tsp dried dill
 1 lemon
 2 granny smith apples
 2 tsp brown sugar
 1 tsp cinnamon
 1 packet instant oats
 Aluminum foil

At home

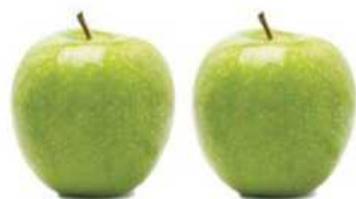
Pack stuffing mix into a zip-top bag. Shred the mozzarella and repackage. Blend brown sugar and cinnamon together in a zip-top bag.

In camp

Salmon Cakes: Mince onion and sauté in butter until translucent. In a separate bowl, combine onion with 4 mayo packets, 2 tsp lemon juice, mozzarella cheese, stuffing mix, and salmon. Let set for 15 minutes before shaping into patties. Fry in a buttered nonstick skillet until golden brown. Don't flip prematurely; uncooked patties crumble when faced with an overeager spatula.

Garlic-Lemon Aioli: Mince garlic and combine with dried dill, a generous squeeze of lemon, and the remaining mayo. Spoon over salmon cakes.

Baked Apples: Toast oats in a dry nonstick skillet. Core apples and drop 1 pat of butter and half the cinnamon-sugar mixture in each. Wrap in foil and roast over a campfire until skin is loose and browned. Top with toasted oats.



\$25 Hug a Wolf



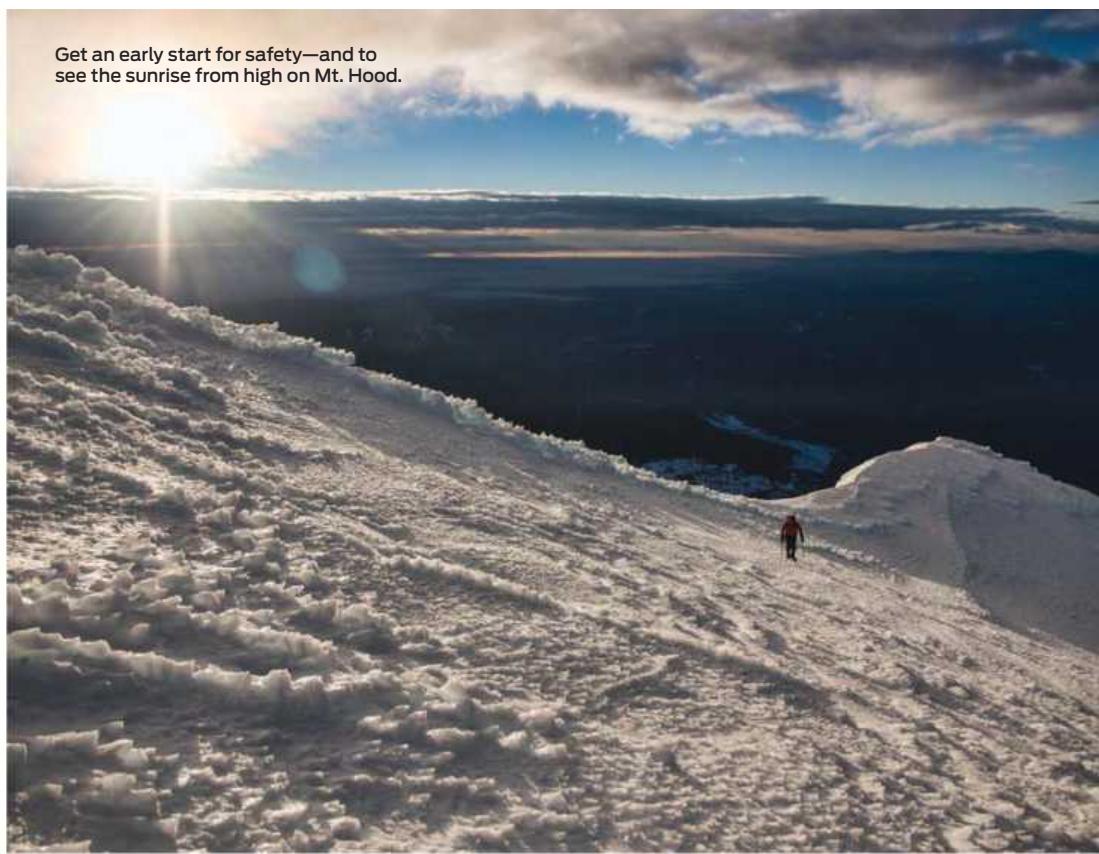
Getting a nuzzle from the king of canines is like getting an autograph from a celebrity, albeit a little sloppier: You've seen all his movies and gotten lost in those dreamy, intense eyes. Yes, it's a little intimidating. After all, this is one of nature's most perfect predators. Lucky for you, at Mission: Wolf you're already on his good side and the wolves are eager to meet their fans.

When you visit the sanctuary, the (human) staff escorts you to enclosures where friendly ambassador wolves like to saunter up and say hi. These rescued wolves retain wild features that set them apart from domestic dogs, and they often weigh more than 100 pounds. But, like your pooch at home, they come right up to you expectantly, often leaning in to say hello.

Info Mission: Wolf (missionwolf.org) is roughly 15 miles from Westcliffe, Colorado. Admission is free but call ahead and please give a modest donation: \$20 (or \$20 worth of frozen meat) is suggested, but we suggest a tip. The sanctuary is open from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Try to visit on Wednesdays or Saturdays, when the wolves are more outgoing (due to feeding schedule). Bonus: free camping.

—James Dziezynski

Get an early start for safety—and to see the sunrise from high on Mt. Hood.



\$30

CLIMB A BIG MOUNTAIN—UNGUIDED

Most technical climbs cost upwards of \$1,500 when you factor in the training and guides required. But not Mt. Hood. Call it the everyman's Rainier.

We could say we love all summits equally, but that would be a lie. Some just, well, rise above the rest. But reaching the fiercest of peaks can be overly daunting for many of us. Enter 11,240-foot Mt. Hood. It has the cloud-piercing loftiness, the otherworldly glaciers, and the see-forever views we want in our most rewarding summits. Yet, unlike many of the rest of them, it's just friendly enough to let a newbie mountaineer hit it without a guide. While legend says the snow-capped volcano has been climbed in high heels, we recommend mountaineering boots, full crampons, ice axe, and a helmet (\$30/day for the set; info below), as well as warm layers (it's snow-covered year-round). You'll also need a basic knowledge of walking in spikes, using an ice axe, and avalanche know-how. Aim for the south slope, which is about as nontechnical as a technical route can be, with regular 40-degree pitches up snowy faces, mandatory rest stepping, and the potential for intense weather—but without the maze of bottomless crevasses and extreme routefinding. Even better: You can do it in a single day. From the historic Timberline Lodge, take the standard Hogsback Route 4 miles (climbing 5,300 feet) to the summit. The path is straightforward enough and more than likely to have been broken by earlier herds of climbers, but set aside five hours to get to the top; get an alpine start (between midnight and 2 a.m.) to ensure you get up and down before the afternoon sun loosens the snowpack, increasing the risk of rock fall. If all goes according to plan, you'll be back at the lodge (free coffee!) with enough daylight left for another adventure. **Permit Required** (free); self-issue at the trailhead. **Outfitter** Mountain Shop (mountainshop.net) in Portland **Contact** bit.do/climbing-hood —Ryan Wichelns

PHOTOS BY (CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT) ISTOCKPHOTO.COM / KENNETH CANNING, KEVIN MACHTELINCKX, ISTOCKPHOTO.COM / ARPAD BENEDEK, ILLUSTRATION BY VIDHYA NAGARAJA



\$75 *Plant a flag in a national park
Sponsor an acre at Cuyahoga Valley, Ohio.
Info: conservancyforcvnp.org*



\$95* FOLLOW A 5TH GRADER

Let a 10-year-old be your guide and discover a new kind of fun. By Dennis Lewon

Thunk. That's the sound of a quarter-size rock hitting the ground after being shot skyward with a slingshot, then free-falling about 100 feet back to earth.

Eeyahhh! That's the sound of five preadolescent boys scattering in all directions, hands over heads, evading the missile.

"Guys, do you really think this is such a good idea?" That's the sound of reason, I hope, as I try to persuade 10-year-olds to exercise a level of caution not usually associated with anyone their age.

Eeyahhh! Thunk. No dice.

When I told Tate, my youngest son, that he could plan and lead a weekend backpacking trip with his friends, there'd been some debate over the rules. "You mean I can get any food I want?" he asked. Yes. "Can we go to a lake where we can swim and make a campfire?" Yes. "And we get to make all the decisions?"

"Um, yes," I responded. Then thought better of it and added a caveat, "Unless you decide to do something dangerous."

I'm about to remind him of the fine print and put an end to the slingshot game. But the warm August sun must have reached a critical height, because just then, on our second day at Bowen

Lake, the kids decide it's time to go jump in the icy water.

Tate retrieves the bathrobe he packed for this occasion. It's pale green, thick and soft, full-length—and heavier and bulkier than his sleeping bag. I saw him cram it into his backpack but didn't say anything. The only rule is nothing dangerous. Dumb is just fine.

The idea for a kids-in-charge trip originated earlier in the summer, when Tate asked if I would take him and his friends backpacking. Like a scout trip without the uniforms. "Sure," I said, "why don't you organize it?" From there it was a natural evolution to him leading it. I wanted to see what he and his friends would learn by being responsible for things adults usually manage. And I wondered what I would learn from them.

It doesn't take long to realize that my first lesson will be patience. We've traveled 300 feet from the trailhead when Tate announces, "Let's stop for a snack here." He indicates a pine-shaded patch of ground from which we can still see the car. It takes considerable effort for me to resist pointing out that they just polished off a bag of chips on the way to the trailhead, and we only just started hiking, and have almost 4 miles to go, with a steep climb to Blue Ridge just ahead.

Still, I can't fault Tate for taking his job to heart. A good guide anticipates needs—thirst, hunger, fatigue—and addresses them. No one protests.

"There are enough Clif Bars for one each," he says, distributing them to his friends Jackson and Van, both 10, Banyan, 11, and Zig, Tate's 12-year-old brother. (Tate tried to use his position as trip leader to prevent his brother from coming, which almost got him fired before he started.) During the break, the kids discuss variations on the game "camouflage" they've all played at camp, and debate the rules they'll use this time. I'm worried they're going to start playing here, within sight of the trailhead.

But five minutes later, we're hiking again, ascending to Bowen Lake in Colorado's Never Summer Wilderness.

Five minutes later, we're eating again.

This time it's jerky, teriyaki flavor. I can't deny it's a fine place for a break. We sit on a wooden bridge, with our feet hanging over a burbling creek. Late-summer wildflowers add dashes of yellow and purple to the grass-lined gully. The kids admire the scenery for a few seconds, then start cataloguing the rest of the snacks on the menu: apple rings, chocolate-covered pretzels, dried mango, fruit leather, Smarties, chocolate bars. Is this hike even long enough for all the breaks they have planned? I realize that adults talk a good game about the journey being the destination, but we could take a page from these kids if we mean it.

Sufficiently fueled, we hike for more than 30 minutes without stopping. The route climbs to the top of 11,000-foot Blue Ridge, then follows the crest for a couple of miles to a saddle above Bowen Lake. At the ridgeline, the trail forks at a signed junction, with one path continuing straight, down the other side, and the other heading right to stay on the ridge.

"Which way should we go?" I ask. Zig studies the trail sign, which doesn't actually mention Bowen Lake.

Tate ignores the sign and says, without hesitating, "Let's go straight, I think the lake is right down that hill."

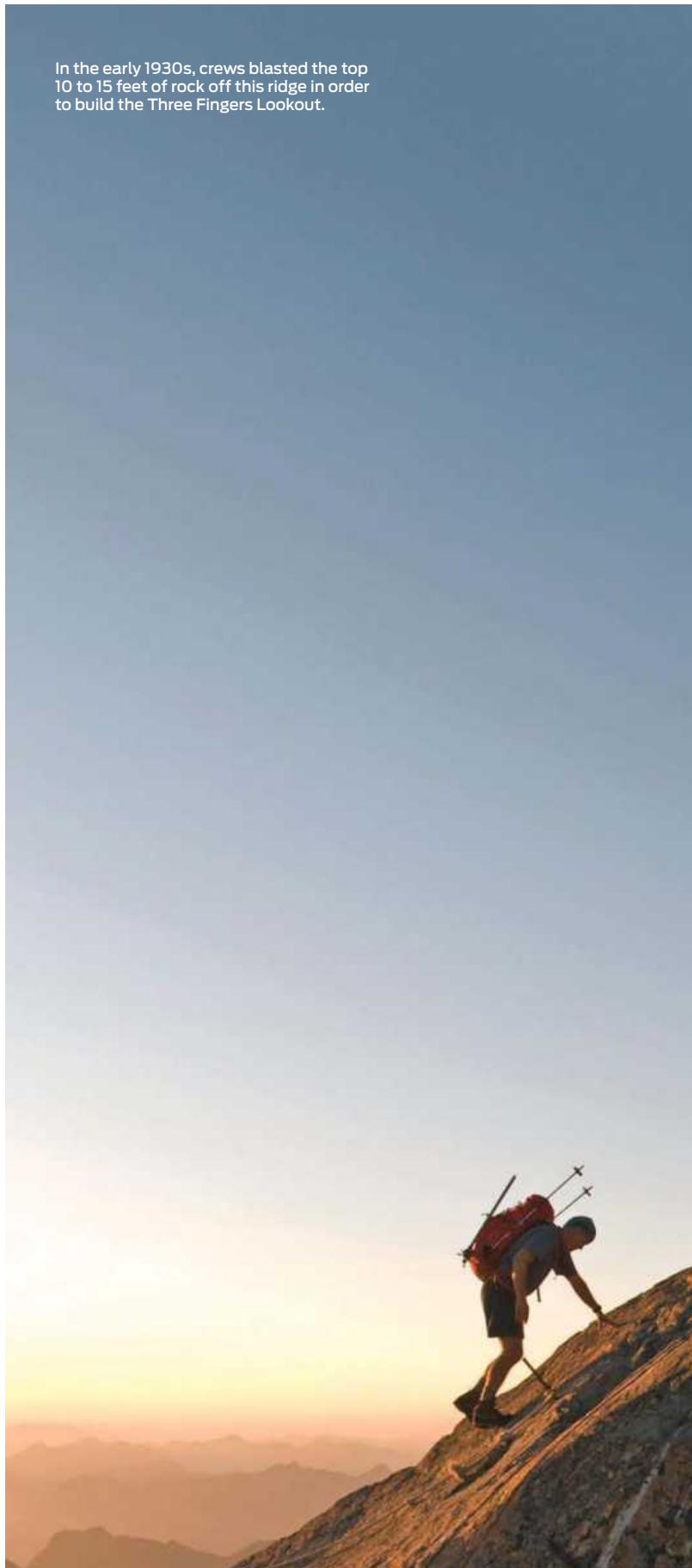
Jackson chimes in, "Wow, that was easy!"

"Maybe it's to the right," Zig says.

I've seen this scenario on plenty of backpacking trips. Routefinding question comes up. Group huddles over a map and discusses options. Leader manages the conversation to reach consensus. Group continues hiking.

Here's how it looks when fifth graders are in charge: *How cold do you think the lake is? Maybe we should have*

In the early 1930s, crews blasted the top 10 to 15 feet of rock off this ridge in order to build the Three Fingers Lookout.



\$150* SCORE A ROOM WITH A VIEW

Your tent-door view may be perfectly framed, but nothing compares to the bird's-eye vantage you'll score from a backcountry fire tower. Now add stoves and refrigerators, beds, tables and chairs, and outhouses. Also included: Unlimited wilderness right outside your front door. Hike to one of these towers for a perfect weekend.

— Sarah Lynne Nelson

1. Garnet Mountain Fire Lookout

Custer Gallatin National Forest, Montana

Set on the 8,245-foot apex of Garnet Mountain, this tower's wrap-around catwalk offers views of the 11,000-foot Spanish Peaks to the west and the 10,000-foot Gallatin Range to the south. It's 3.5 miles deep into the wilderness, so while you're there, don't miss bagging 7,165-foot Storm Castle Peak, about 5 miles east of the tower.

Get there Take the Garnet Mountain Lookout Trail 3.5 miles to the lookout. **Cost** \$30/night **Max group size** 4 **Contact** bit.do/GarnetMtnLookout

2. Clear Lake Cabin Lookout

Mt. Hood National Forest, Oregon

Get up close and personal with Mt. Hood: This 40-foot-tall tower's 14-by-14-foot cab sits on the mountain's southern slope. The tower is only open November through May, so you'll have to ski (or snowshoe) the 4 miles in. Tour 4.5 miles over to frozen Little Crater Lake while you're there.

Get there Park at the Skyline Road Sno Park and ski, snowshoe, or hike (weather permitting).8 mile on FS 42 to 240 Spur Road; continue 3.2 miles to the lookout. **Cost** \$50/night **Max group size** 2 **Contact** bit.do/ClearLakeCabin

3. Shorty Peak Lookout

Idaho Panhandle National Forests, Idaho

Perched atop a knob on 6,515-foot Shorty Peak, this 15-by-15-foot cabin comes complete with 360-degree vistas including 6,265-foot Red Top Mountain to the south and 6,732-foot Lone Tree Peak to the west. For an even better vantage point, bag Lone Tree Peak via a 1.5-mile walk from the tower.

Get there Park at the trailhead on Road 282; then hike 2.5 miles beyond the gate to reach the lookout. **Cost** \$25/night **Max group size** 2 **Contact** bit.do/ShortyPeakLookout

4. Three Fingers Lookout

Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, Washington

Built atop a narrow cliff at 6,850 feet, this 14-by-14-foot tower is well worth the 7.5-mile haul in: Windows on all four walls give overnighters both the perfect sunset (over the Puget Sound) and sunrise (over Mt. Baker).

Get there From the Saddle Lake trailhead, take #641 about 7 miles to Tin Pan Gap; from here, traverse Three Fingers Glacier (mountaineering know-how required) for a half mile and climb the three wooden ladders to the lookout. **Cost** Free (first-come, first-serve) **Max group size** 2 **Contact** bit.do/ThreeFingersLookout

a snack? Should we save the chocolate for camp? Did you see Jackson drop his water bottle down the hill and go sliding after it? Is that bear poop?

When it comes to navigating, they don't actually decide anything. Zig and Banyan, who have been hiking in front, simply put their packs on and start up the trail to the right. The others follow. Either Tate has forgotten his urge to go straight, or has reconsidered. As it happens, right is the correct direction, but I'm not sure anyone learned anything.

Three hours later, we stand on a wind-swept ridge at 11,500 feet. The peaks of northern Rocky Mountain National Park stab the horizon before us. Five hundred feet below, Bowen Lake sits in a cirque with a boulder-lined shore on one side and forest-shaded campsites on the other. It's all I can do to keep up as the kids practically race down the switchbacks to the lake.

When I arrive at a destination like this, I want to scout the lake for the best campsite, but Tate doesn't consider this a critical part of his job. Actually, I don't think looking for any campsite is on his mind. The kids drop their packs in a shoreline meadow and sprint off to throw rocks in the water.

Fortunately, they're soon hungry again, which reminds Tate about the canned chicken soup they packed. Which reminds

him that we need to make camp to cook.

We find a campsite in a stand of pines overlooking the lake. Setting up camp, for a 10-year-old, apparently consists of throwing packs down and running off to play. That's what the three fifth graders do (after Tate delegates warming up the soup, to me). But there must be some camping gene that turns on between 10 and 12, because Zig and Banyan insist on setting up their tent and laying out their bags and pads before relaxing, just as I've seen many adults do. There might have been a lesson here if it had rained. But it doesn't. In fact, hours later, after dark, Jackson, Van, and Tate think it's pretty fun setting up their tent by headlamp.

They also fail to learn what I expect they will from the groceries Tate picked. I checked his shopping before we packed up at home, and most of it looked pretty smart—dried fruit, ramen, bagels, salami—but I thought the kids would complain about carrying canned soup and root beer. Wrong. What do they know about ounce counting? Besides, I realize, I've happily luggered a few cans of beer into the backcountry. Are these treats any different? Perhaps they *are* learning to think like backpackers: There are penalties—and rewards—for everything we carry.

"When are you going to hang a bear bag?" I ask Tate at dusk. I figure this

comes under the danger rule: I should remind him it's his responsibility, but if he fails, I won't let them sleep with a pile of food in the middle of camp. I suspect it's going to take quite awhile for him and his small-armed buddies to get a rope over a branch.

"Come on," he rallies the crew, and they set off to find a suitable branch. He and Zig have helped me hang a bear bag, so they know what they're looking for. After a few minutes of exploring, they find a likely candidate, but it's 20 feet high—a tough throw.

"I don't know," I caution. "Is it too high?" I'm imagining kids throwing the rope for the next two hours.

"I can do it," Tate says. "I'll climb up."

Over the years, I've seen hundreds of bear bags get hung. I've never seen someone climb a tree to do it. But this tree has thin, dead branches running up its trunk like a ladder. They'd never hold the weight of a bear, but manage a 70-pound fifth grader just fine. Tate scampers up, throws the rope over the desired branch from about 4 feet away, and comes back down. The whole operation takes less than 10 minutes.

On the way back to camp, everyone gathers sticks for marshmallow roasting. S'mores ingredients were on the packing list, naturally, as were pocketknives for whittling sticks.

Five boys wielding knives, I assume, will be the biggest safety issue of the trip (the slingshot game won't come until tomorrow). But they all insist they're expert whittlers, which mostly seems true. Only one Band-Aid is required.

They gather around the campfire pit with marshmallow sticks that look like spears capable of bringing down a large deer.

But there's just one snag in the plan: The kids can't get a fire started. I supplied a lighter but no paper or instructions, and one after the other they build complicated structures out of sticks and fail to light them. I want them to succeed, just as they've succeeded at every other task today, but I admit it's gratifying when Tate asks me to start the fire. I can see it won't be long before he and his buddies are planning their own backpacking trips, and the only thing they'll need from me is the car keys. But I'm glad we're not quite there yet.

"How many marshmallows can we have?" Tate asks, momentarily forgetting who's in charge.

I'm tempted to impose a limit. That's a parent's job, right? Not this time. "I don't know," I answer. "You guys decide."

In a few short years, they're going to be making more important decisions than this on their own. I'm glad Tate and the others have had this chance to get a taste of independence in the backcountry. Hopefully, the experience will help them act smarter and safer wherever they go.

Then they eat a dangerous amount of s'mores. ▀

Editor-in-chief Dennis Lewon plans to have more snack breaks on all future trips.





Narrow gauge rails are 3 feet apart (more than a foot narrower than standard), making them more suitable to mountain terrain.

COMMAND RESPECT

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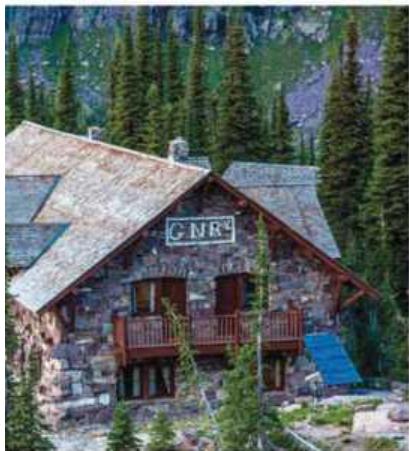


\$101 Ride the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Train

There's a certain silence, usually reserved for departing bush planes, that drops on a left-alone hiker like a weight. But in southern Colorado, you can get that same experience when the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge leaves you smack in the middle of the big, bad Weminuche Wilderness, land of Fourteeners, alpine lakes, and not a single car. One of our favorite trips: a peakbagging expedition to Chicago Basin. Jump off the train at Needleton and hike 6.5 miles to camp under the turrets of the Needle Mountains. [Info durangotrain.com](http://durangotrain.com)

\$149 LEARN LIFE-SAVING SKILLS

If your backcountry emergency plan consists of Duct Tape and Advil, it's time for an upgrade. Learn the fundamentals of preparing for, preventing, and reacting to common medical scenarios with the new online course we're developing with the experts at Mountain Education and Development. Best part: Study anytime, anywhere. To register, go to backpacker.com/courses.



\$204

SLEEP IN A BACKCOUNTRY CHALET

Imagine a Swiss Alps vacation: chalet with a view, soft bed and warm blankets, delicious meals served hot. Now imagine scoring the dream without going to Europe. High in Glacier National Park, the Sperry Chalet has been a refuge for hikers since 1913. It's not fancy—no electricity, no plumbing—but the woodstove-heated dining room feels deluxe. The most direct route is a steep 6.7 miles on the Sperry Trail from Lake MacDonald Lodge, but strong hikers can get there via a 13.5-mile approach on the park's famed Gunsight Pass Trail (ice axe and traction devices needed in early season). Either way, be sure to make the 4-mile hike to Sperry Glacier when you're at the chalet. **Price** \$204 for first person, \$144 for each additional person in same room (2015 prices); includes three meals per day and bedding **Reservations** Available January 11 for the 2016 season **Info** sperrychalet.com

\$370 See routes where others see cliffs

The granite face ahead of me does not look like a viable route up this mountain. I'm used to hiking off trail, so I wasn't fazed by our group's steep push up a grassy foothill or our tiptoe across fallen logs. But now the world of "walking" and "slopes" is ending, and what lies ahead can really only be called a cliff. A cliff that we will climb. Because we are, as of today, Mountaineers. Newbie, beginner, not-that-competent mountaineers, of course—you can't get that far in just one weekend. But this is how it starts.

As our Colorado Mountain School instructor, Brent, points out the route we'll be following up the cliff, I realize that we're learning about more than just how to tie a few knots, wear a climbing harness, walk with a rope team. Those skills are important, of course, and we spent all of yesterday practicing them. But today, as we use our new tricks to climb 10,486-foot McGregor Mountain in Rocky Mountain National Park, we're also learning a new way to see the world.

Before, I would have only perceived one route up this peak, via its forested, gentle backside. Now, the pathways have multiplied, the possibilities sprouting like mushrooms after hard rains. A cliff doesn't have to be an obstacle. It can be a way up—and a way to challenge myself.

Later, as we hike down after a triumphant push to the summit, we look back at what we accomplished. McGregor's sheer southern face rises out of the trees like a headstone. "I can't believe we just climbed that," someone says. I agree, it's hard to fathom. But only for now.

—Rachel Zurer

Try it

Colorado Mountain School, Estes Park, CO (\$475; coloradomountainschool.com)
International Mountain Climbing School, North Conway, NH (\$370; ime-usa.com/imcs)
Northeast Mountain Guiding (\$200-\$250; northeastmountainguiding.com)
Fox Mountain Guides & Climbing School, Pisgah Forest, NC (\$575; foxmountainguides.com)
Utah Mountain Adventures, Salt Lake City, UT (\$420; utahmountainadventures.com)
Alpine Skills International, Truckee, CA (\$445; alpineskills.com)
Mountain Madness, Bellingham, WA (\$475; mountainmadness.com)

\$199 TO \$299 PREP FOR A THRU-HIKE

We've enlisted record-setting distance hiker Liz Thomas to help you plan and complete a thru-hike. backpacker.com/courses

\$300* DIY KAYAKING

Rent a boat for a week and discover a new way to explore the wilderness.

Apostle Islands, Lake Superior, WI

Twenty-one islands and 12 miles of lakeshore serve up prime paddling and wilderness camping. Explore sea caves on Madeline Island and Meyers Beach while floating past some of the oldest rock formations on Earth. Note: Stay close to shore and monitor the weather, which can bring quick-striking fog, wind, and waves. All rentals require a \$25, one-hour safety course beforehand. **Info** apostleislands-kayak.com

Roche Harbor, San Juan Island, WA

Rent a kayak from the Adventure Center at Roche Harbor on San Juan Island and you can head straight out the Spieden Channel to paddle among the orca whales of Haro Strait. Experienced? Paddle 5 miles across Spieden Channel to Stuart Island and camp. **Info** sanjuanoutfitters.com

Acadia National Park, ME

Glaciated bays, islands, and inlets make for ideal "gunkholing," as locals call exploring by water here. Rent kayaks in Lamoine and paddle 8.6 miles round-trip along the Salt Water Discovery Trail in Frenchman Bay, from Lamoine State Park to Bar Harbor, Thompson Island, and the Jordan River. Caution: Tides, seas, fog, and 55°F water test even seasoned paddlers. **Info** barharborguideservice.bravehost.com
—Eugene Buchanan



*APPROXIMATE RENTAL COST FOR TWO KAYAKS FOR A WEEK



\$600
WAKE UP
TO THIS

The Pacific Tree Climbing Institute offers full-service overnights in Oregon's Willamette National Forest, east of Eugene. For \$600, you get training, a couple meals, and a night's sleep in a Treeboat hammock, hundreds of feet off the ground. Wake up to a cup of coffee, a hot peppermint towel, and songbirds humming about around you. **Season** April to November **Info** pacifictreeclimbing.com

READERS' CHOICE: YOUR TOP TRIPS FOR \$250

Spend a week on Isle Royale National Park frolicking with the moose. —Jay Minard *Hire pack goats: You'll hike farther and lighter, and have just as much fun. —Olzeke Burnett* *Bury the money in the backcountry, make a few maps of where it is, and leave them at nearby campsites for people to find. —Ryan Klarcyk*



\$650*

*Bike rental and food for two

THE NEW AGE OF EXPLORATION

*Is ice-bikepacking the cutting edge of adventure?
Probably not. But being first is always worth the effort.
By Casey Lyons / Photography by Andrew Bydlon*



Ice-biking pioneers leave their gear behind to explore Burntside Lake in northern Minnesota.

\$7,000

\$50,000

2016 ADVENTURE GUIDE



Man and bike prepare for movement without friction.



THERE WAS NO REASON TO EXPECT THE ICE WOULD HOLD OUR WEIGHT.

Not from the scene in Duluth, where the first tanker of the year had sashayed into port the day before we did, heralding the melt. Nor was there any reassurance from the lakes we saw on the way to our starting point, marked as they were with ominous dark sections of open water.

But the three Minnesota boys seem confident. Or at least willing to get wet. I, on the other hand, am not possessed of the same sort of optimistic bravado. Because, man, it is cold, but maybe not cold *enough*, and as a kid who grew up being warned to stay off always-too-thin lake ice in Connecticut, I'm sketched out about what lies ahead.

We're standing shoulder-to-shoulder astride our fat bikes 40 feet from the maybe-frozen, definitely freezing water of Bass Lake on a little peninsula of national forest that juts into the Boundary Waters. We look like a phalanx from some Western—if Red Bull made Westerns—ready to bomb into town on 4-inch-wide tires and serve up some justice.

There is always a moment when an idea reveals its true nature, good or bad, and this is ours. Either we're about to become trailblazers in an adventure we'll call ice-bikepacking, or we're going to sink four gear-laden bikes in very cold water. We will know in 40 feet.

“Let's crush this!” says Andrew Bydlon, our photographer, as he rolls forward. The snow crunches as he heads down the embankment, picking up speed.

But at the seam between land and lake the bike suddenly jerks like a balking horse. Bydlon muscles the handlebars to try and straighten 'er out, but his front wheel goes up

to the rim in slush and he searches for a way to safely slow his momentum. No sir. Down he goes in a tremendous crash, all arms and limbs and spinning wheels, his head jerking to the side as though he'd been beamed with a water balloon.

“Are you OK?” one of us calls.

“Reaaaarrh” he returns.

“Are you on the ice?”

“Reaaaarrh,” he yells, pounding on the ground.

“Is it solid?”

“Reaaaarrh.”

If that doesn't seem like the kind of ground-truthing that gets you excited to risk your life pedaling over a maybe-frozen lake, then you will probably live a long life, seat-belted in next to your survival instinct.

But where's the fun in that?

→ When a newspaper reporter asked George Mallory why he wanted to climb Everest, he famously answered, “Because it's there.”

It was there, he was there, and no one else had been there. That's the stuff history is made of.

But, by and large, history has passed us by when it comes to “no one else has

been there." These days, the world is a pincushion of waypoints, wrapped in a cocoon of GPS track logs. Since go-first is gone, for the most part, our options today are to go weird or go fast, and since fast is the domain of semi-sponsored, super-fit mutants, the weird is the only option left for most of us.

So in a way I was primed for Bydlon to walk into my office one day last winter, 90 years after Mallory famously pronounced his reasoning, and speak the words that would launch our epic: "We should go fatbiking."

"Um, why?" I asked.

"Because it's awesome."

"A lot of stuff is awesome," I answered, dismissively. But as I thought on it for a few days, I saw the idea for what it was. We weren't going to just go fatbiking, we were going to take this relatively new sport, and through gumption and geography, turn it into that rarest of things: something genuinely new. Fat-bikepacking, on ice.

Won't you be cold? some people asked. The subzero temps, -60°F wind chill, and long nights were all part of the charm, I'd say. *What if you fall through the ice?* another asked. We'll be safe, I assured, without thinking it through.

But there was one question that didn't have such an easy answer. My nana said it best when I told her about the prospective trip. After a pause, she asked, "Why would you want do to that?"

Here's what I told her: I thought it would be fun.

OK, maybe not fun like most people define it, but the other kind: periods of suffering punctuated by occasional laughter, with, hopefully, a feeling of accomplishment you don't get from a weekend hike. So-called Type 2 fun.

Even if I couldn't explain it, the idea seemed simple enough: Trace the under-the-radar Circle Route, a 30-mile, three-day canoe route in the Superior National Forest, at times less than a mile from the famed Boundary Waters, where mechanized travel is not allowed. We'd cross frozen lakes big and small, camp on islands, shoreline, or the ice. And we'd do it hauling all our gear in the tradition of backpacking and old-school winter expeditions.

This wouldn't be *terra incognita*, not really. But we coined a new term for this kind of pioneering travel: adventure incognita.

→ **The ice is noisy.** It squeals and it whines, and at night, it sounds like a bunch of chatty whales pinging each other endlessly. I can even hear it crunching beneath my fat bike's tires once my breath calms down enough that I can hear anything at all. White creases show where sheets of ice press into each other.

Sightlines are long in ice country, and we can see our campsite a few miles

ahead on the tree-lined shore. The ice passes beneath our tires as our confidence builds and balance steadies. (Bydlon's start notwithstanding, the water is sufficiently frozen, so far.)

The Minnesota boys and I glide along, far from the rock- and frosted fir-covered shoreline. We slide into our first campsite at the ice's edge, and I resist the urge to kiss the solid ground. After setting up our four-man tepee, we fire up the titanium woodstove that fits inside, making a 10-foot-tall refuge of baselayer weather.

And then something curious happens (yes, after a round or two of Jameson). As though hunting for a victim, a new idea stalks in: We should go ice biking... at night. We crunch out under a swirl of stars, nervous breaths making big plumes of steam, into the lake's center. One factor we hadn't anticipated: These lakes see plenty of snowmobile and ATV traffic, and their tracks freeze into raised ridges—like booby traps for mountain bikes, no matter how fat the tires. The trick is to hit the grooves perfectly perpendicular or else the ice gremlins snatch out your front tire.

After a few bruises, we stop and gather. Then a distant crackling gets closer. I look to the others who are looking at me, smiling. "Shouldn't we spread out?" I ask. And then the crack moves right beneath my feet, causing me to take a half-squat "ready" stance while the others laugh. They may be ice-biking rookies, but these Minnesotans know ice: nothing happens. I look to Bydlon. "Crazy, right?" he says, smiling.

That sounds accurate. I'd like to claim some reason for exploring the ice at night, but we are not explorers clinging to the margins of the known, on some holy purpose to drive forward humanity's mastery of the world. Instead, we are adventurers—not even smart ones, it turns out—exploring a new type of fun.

It wasn't always this way, of course. Explorers used to be the opposite of frivolous, employed by kings and queens to literally map—and thereby, change—the world. Later, mountaineers assumed the mantle of "serious adventurer." First ascents *matter*. But then the tide turned, revealing an increase in risk for diminishing returns of glory. Just look at how we stack on modifiers. Take Denali: First ascent (1913), first solo ascent (1970), first solo ascent in winter (1988), first solo ascent in January (2015). We can go on and on until others think we're twisted seekers of our own doom, a suicide tribe looking for silly ways to die.

→ **This is a good time** to introduce our little outfit, none of whom has a death wish. We have Bydlon, whose four words launched four men and 300 pounds of gear-laden fat bicycles. There's Tom, Bydlon's childhood friend and co-troublemaker, who's got a quiet intensity to him.



Firsts come with unexpected perks, such as this view from the cockpit as the sun sets over Tee Lake.

The team's bikes were laden with cold-weather gear (below), but it was worth it for the luxe accommodations (right).



The final Minnesotan is Jim, Tom's genial father who's never short of words and solid, salt-of-the-earth instructions, and the only one of us who's ridden a fat bike before. Jim embodies everything you think you know about Minnesotans: funny accent, easy going, straightforward.

To the Minnesota boys, ice is home turf, the stuff you drive a car over on the way to a fishing hole. They jumped at the chance to use the ice in a new way. Though Jim hasn't camped in years, he's as happy as if you took him to Yosemite in summer, probably happier.

Fortunately, his relaxed vibe rubs off on the rest of us—even as we continue to see signs of thaw. In the morning, after packing back into our panniers and pushing off, the ice cracks terrifyingly beneath our tires. At the summer route's portages, we ride through the woods, gathering way more speed than is safe.

The most defining characteristic of ice biking, though, turns out to be the full-body tension called up by the battle against the ice gremlins. Between riding past frozen-over fishing holes, the constant cracking, and the ice ridges that drop us like snipers, my body gets so clenched it'd deflect a bullet.

Bicycling over ice, even with 4-inch-wide tires, is like being in a very slow-speed accident. Crashing is a matter of when, not if (even Jim goes down). Here's how it happens: An obstacle appears up ahead. You think, *I'll just steer a little left to avoid it.* But devoid of traction on the front tire, you cannot actually steer. You think to yourself, *I should bail*, but your rubber boot sole can't grip any better and

you slip, fall, crack your knee, and lie prone, staring at the sky and building up the will to hoist the bike and throw your leg over it again. Meanwhile, your companions' response turns from laughter, to asking if you're OK, to ignoring you altogether, and back to laughter, but the exhausted kind.

Which is why relief comes so completely when the second day delivers us to the tiny speck of Tee Lake and a bluff-top campsite. The ice reflects the advancing sunset as far-shore shadows lengthen over the expanse. We can't say we're the first to camp here in the wintertime, but right now, it sure feels that way.

→ In 1971, soon-to-be-world-famous alpinist Reinhold Messner wrote an essay he titled "The Murder of the Impossible," decrying the use of new equipment and thuggish techniques (rather than the elegance of skill and judgment) as somehow cheating history, mankind, and the mountains themselves. His protest was keen—but ultimately doomed. We, collectively, wrestled the impossible into submission. (Just ask the 80-year-old who summited Everest in 2013 or the double amputee who did it in 2006.) The only limit of possibility became the imagination (see: ski-BASEing). Everything is possible with gear and determination.

We pedal along little inlets and open ice, connecting bodies of water by riding the portages. The spring-like conditions make for comfortable temps and

sun-bright skies that keep our fingers and toes happy all day. We pass pocket campsites carved out of clearings and walk our bikes past small sections of open water in the narrow straits between lakes. We mostly stop caring about all the falling—it's just part of the routine—and simply enjoy the semi-frozen scenery and remarkable solitude.

We also enjoy something else I hadn't anticipated: Let's call it the first-time filter. Everyone remembers his or her first kiss, first solo night in the woods. We don't know what to expect and that changes our perception. It perks up the mind, breaks it out of that semi-trancelike state we spend our commutes and trips to the supermarket in, and causes it to write grooves deeply into our brains.

By the time we pedal back to the car, we're weary and pretty banged up. And we are pioneers back from the unknown. We can see that written in the faces of passersby in cars. Their wide eyes and raised eyebrows betray their thoughts: *I didn't even know you could do that.*

Yes, next time kneepads, studded tires, and definitely double the whiskey, but total preparation is for the second time. Though it sounds trite, you can only do something first once, no matter how much you wish you knew then what you know now.

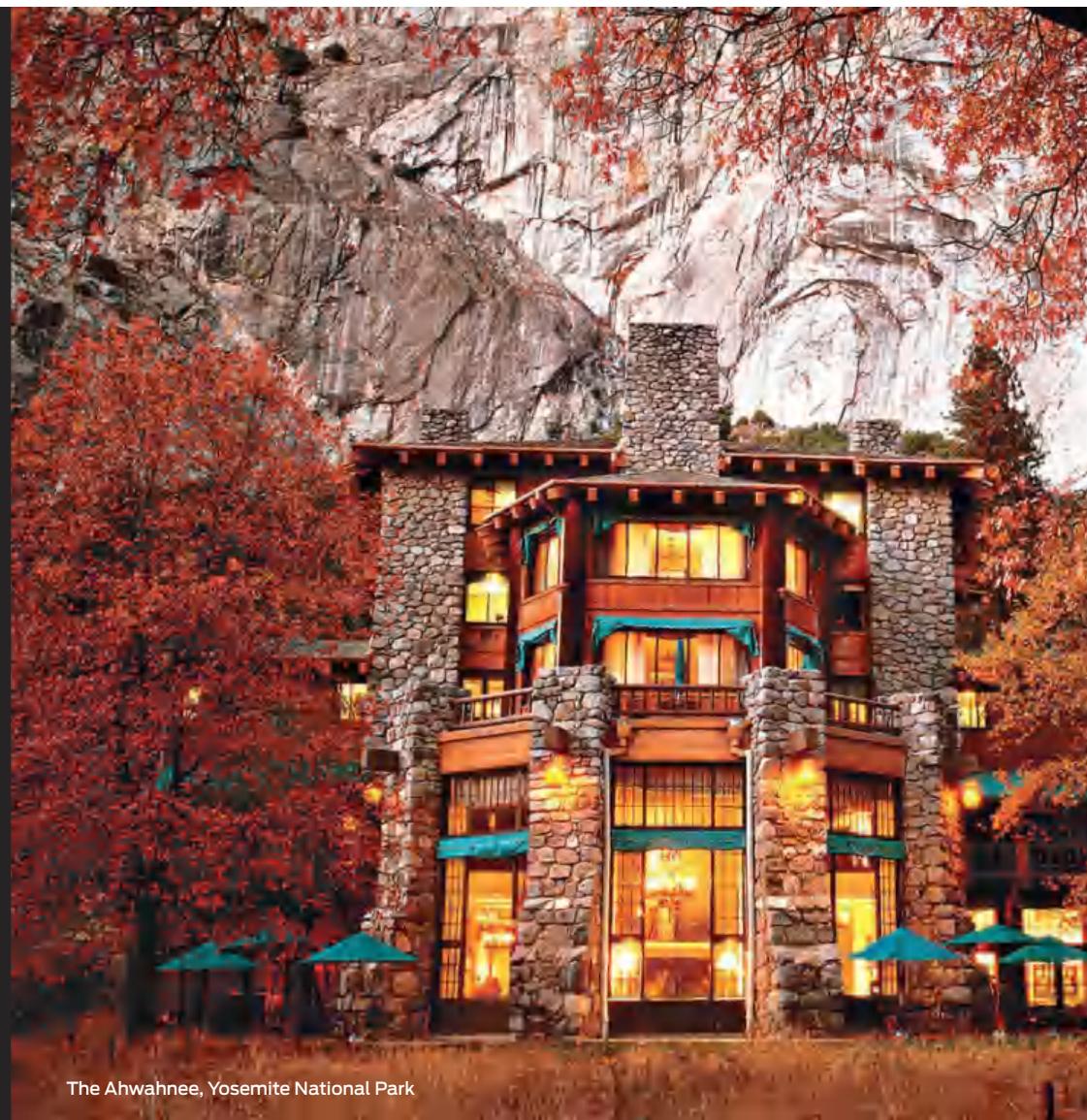
So get out there and find your first. And good luck explaining yourself. ■

Senior Editor Casey Lyons just embarked on his next life-changing adventure: parenthood.

\$900*
LIVE A
LITTLE.

Who knows how much money you've saved over the years by sleeping in the dirt, surviving on freeze-dried meals, and living out of your backpack. You could say you've earned this treat: Spend your days bagging peaks and traversing some of the country's most beautiful wilds, but, come nighttime, enjoy a night spent in one of these famous lodges.

By Sarah Lynne Nelson



The Ahwahnee, Yosemite National Park

1. Trapp Family Lodge

Stowe, Vermont

Typical day Hike the Stowe Pinnacle Trail, a 3.2-mile out-and-back to an outcrop overlooking the Green Mountains (or snowshoe or cross-country ski it in winter). Head back to the lodge, which has Austrian-inspired architecture and is bedecked with Euro furnishings, and relax with a seasonal microbrew from von Trapp Brewing (onsite) paired with house-made pretzels and beer-cheese dip. Then, head to dinner and get your fill of roasted East Coast halibut before turning down in your room that faces the Greens.

Cost Starting at \$195 per night
Contact trappfamily.com

2. The Ahwahnee

Yosemite, California

Typical day The path up Tenaya Creek to Mirror Lake is right outside the front door, but don't feel restricted: Catch the free park shuttle to get a drop-off at any number of other trails to marquee landmarks like Half Dome, Glacier Point, and Yosemite Fall—all of which are visible from the hotel. Recharge with a premium martini and antipasti at the outdoor patio before feasting on steak in the magnificent dining room—34-foot-high ceilings, sugar pine trestles, and chandeliers set the mood (proper attire kindly requested). Then, retire to your room, which overlooks the park.

Cost Starting at \$350 per night
Contact yosemitelodge.com

3. Salish Lodge & Spa

Snoqualmie, Washington

Typical day Start your day with the famous four-course Country Breakfast. Check out 270-foot Snoqualmie Falls on the property before exploring part of the 108-mile John Wayne Pioneer Trail, which traverses the old Pacific Railroad. After, snack on house-made potato chips in The Attic with a signature Pike Brewing Company ale that features honey from the lodge's onsite apiary. Make your way to the main dining room for mushroom and truffle risotto before warming up by the fireplace in your room (that faces the Snoqualmie River).

Cost Starting at \$210 per night
Contact salishlodge.com

4. Whiteface Lodge

Lake Placid, New York

Typical day Wake up before dawn and head 2 miles to Lake Placid to catch the sunrise over the Adirondacks. But don't stop there: Explore parts of the 25-mile Jackrabbit Trail starting with the 3.5-mile (one-way) hike through dense hardwoods to the top of 3,861-foot McKenzie Mountain. Return to the inn, which was made from timber milled on-site, and refuel with a cocktail and truffle salt fries in the lounge before enjoying some locally caught black sea bass in the main dining room. Later, enjoy a 50-minute deep tissue massage or a soak in the jetted tub.

Cost Starting at \$320 per night
Contact thewhitefacelodge.com

\$1,000

HIRE A BACKCOUNTRY CHEF

Put down that camp stove and let a real chef handle it. If you've got a big group (10 or more), effortlessly dining in backcountry luxury is within reach—and totally worth it on trips where you'd rather spend time exploring than slicing and dicing. Around \$100 per person will get you one overnight stay with three fresh meals made by two cooks, plus a porter to carry the pots, pans, and all other cookware. We talked to guide companies that offer this custom service, but only regionally. Contact your local outfitter for an estimate and more information.

***\$1,500 Sponsor a Black Bear** No, you can't take this little guy home, and yes, you might see him again in a few years when he is decidedly less cuddly, but your reward: You can help this orphan grow up. In Lyme, New Hampshire, Ben Kilham takes in cubs whose mothers were killed (either accidentally or purposefully after they lost their fear of humans) and sees them through their first winter. Each spring, he sets them free to fend for themselves, which he's done 130 times and counting. Kilham expects a busy year this year (if past history is a guide), and the cost goes toward food and medical support (but not labor) to keep the north woods brimming with its alpha species. Go to benkilham.com to get involved.*

Home is where you are: an unnamed campsite off the Icefields Parkway, near Waterfowl Lake, Canada.

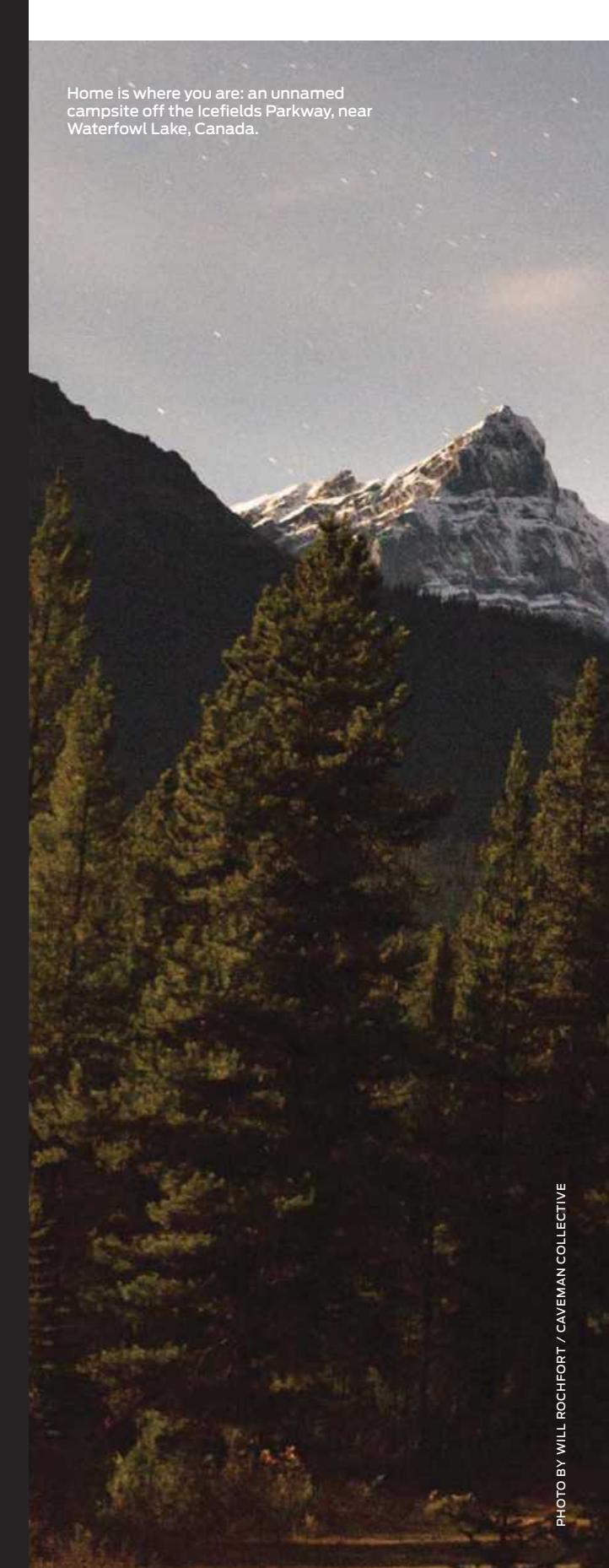


PHOTO BY WILL ROCHFORT / CAVEMAN COLLECTIVE



\$1,250 ENJOY A MOBILE BASECAMP

Why rent a camper for a week? Let us count the reasons:

- 1) Flexibility** If the weather is bad, just move your basecamp.
- 2) Comfort** You can stand up while cooking indoors.
- 3) Efficiency** Hike all day and then drive to a new trailhead and do it again.
- 4) Savings** They get much better gas mileage than RVs, and you're not restricted to crowded RV campgrounds.

Do it

Several outfits rent vehicles like Volkswagen campers and Dodge Sprinters. Prices run about \$150 to \$200 a day, but look for one-way specials. **Info** rockymountaincampervans.com, campervannorthamerica.com, basecampervans.com

FREE

Canyon country: Crete's 1,600-foot-deep Samaria Gorge is the largest of many striking canyons on the island's southwestern coast.



\$2,400* NO RESERVATIONS

A sure way to make a two-week vacation more exciting? Bring a backpack but no plans.

On a Greek island trek, Senior Content Editor **Rachel Zurer** learns the best adventures are the ones you don't expect.

*Price includes airfare (from NY), food, and lodging for two.

PHOTO BY CHRISTOPH BRUGGER



\$7,000

\$50,000

2016 ADVENTURE GUIDE



EVEN MY TOES ARE TENSE AS I SIT ON A ROCK AT THE EDGE OF OUR CAMP SITE, WAITING FOR MY HUSBAND DANNY TO FINISH LOADING HIS PACK SO WE CAN FINALLY START WALKING.

Our fourth day of backpacking around the Greek island of Crete will be our longest yet with at least 11 miles and 4,000 feet of elevation gain, I have no idea where we'll be able to sleep tonight, we have only enough food for lunch, we're running out of money, and the few other people heading our direction left an hour ago, like sensible hikers.

I try to calm down by focusing on my breath, the trees overhead, the sound of the waves lapping the beach 50 yards away. This campsite, in an olive grove just outside the village of Agia Roumeli, is basically paradise. Yesterday was the kind of perfect day we imagined when we decided to take a hiking vacation to Crete's southwestern coast: an exquisite balance of nature and culture, of hard work and relaxation. We woke up in a tiny town accessible only by boat or foot that looked like something out of a Greek Islands calendar, all white-washed walls and blue shutters. After a morning dip and breakfast in a café, we loaded all our gear on our backs and walked an 8-mile wilderness trail along the coast. Just as we were thinking it might be nice to stop to eat lunch, we passed a tavern on the beach, next to a Byzantine chapel. The tavern wasn't open for the season yet, but the owner still scrounged us a small Greek salad to share, some crusty bread, and one stream-chilled beer. We ended our walk at this spectacular free camp-ground in Agia Roumeli, also only served by trails and boats. We arrived after 5 p.m., just in time to see the ferry disappear with the swarms of tourists who finished the popular dayhike down Europe's longest canyon, 10-mile Samaria Gorge. With them gone, we

found a sleepy hamlet. We ended the day with a swim in the 70°F sea and a lavish meal at a tavern that served fresh, local fish, goat cheese, tomatoes, cucumbers, and eggplant.

Yesterday I was having the time of my life. But today, the full weight of our decision to forgo all planning for this vacation crashes over me in waves of anxiety that no glorious yesterday can soothe. My eyes laser into Danny's back as he applies sunscreen in slow motion. Of course he's perfectly calm and happy. He's the go-with-the-flow half of our relationship. This whole no-plans thing was his stupid idea.

→ **Danny has many great qualities.** He's smart, funny, and kind, to name a few obvious ones. But when it comes to our attitudes about moving through time, it's like the universe brought us together just to annoy each other. I set an alarm on the weekends so I can get to the optimal yoga class, then make a list of the relaxing, fun things I want to make sure to fit into my leisure time. He wakes up whenever, and then decides what he feels like doing. Thinking back, it makes total sense that he did some of his first backpacking trips in Denali, where your only choice is to

show up and get assigned a trailless zone to explore; you couldn't map out your route ahead of time if you wanted to. Even though he was a beginner, he forged in with gusto and had many adventures thanks to his willingness to embrace uncertainty and trust that it would all work out. I, on the other hand, once got named "Queen of Plan Ahead and Prepare" by the conservation corps crew I worked with and spent formative months in Yellowstone, where you sleep in designated campsites you reserve in advance—just the way I like it.

For the nearly 10 years Danny and I have been backpacking together, we've mostly done things my way: each day's mileage and elevation change carefully choreographed in advance, each night's campsite Googled for beta and way-pointed into the GPS. It's worked out fine. Great, in fact. Thanks to my affinity for planning, we've seen sunrise over a volcano-ringed lake in Guatemala, trekked amid lions and elephants in South Africa's Kruger National Park, and wandered a full week in the Canyonlands' Maze District without schlepping our water.

But my way has had its downsides, too. The process of planning often stresses me out, especially because I have a hard time getting Danny to provide input on my early-bird timeline. And once we have a plan in place, I can turn into a grump about sticking to it, at the expense of enjoying where we are or adapting to

conditions I could never have predicted.

I know all this, and I know change is good for a person, and I like experiments. So as this trip approached and I sat surrounded by guidebooks and overwhelmed by choices and frustrated that Danny didn't want to get into the nitty-gritty with me, I was perhaps more receptive than usual to the idea he threw out one night: "What if we just don't plan it? What if we don't book any hotels, don't map out our route, don't talk to a guide, and just let it unfold as we go?"

My first reaction: That's insane. The idea of getting on a plane to a foreign country with nothing arranged sounded reckless and terrifying, especially because we knew we wanted to get some wilderness into the trip. On the other hand, if we were ever going to try such a thing, these were nearly ideal circumstances. Our late April/early May time frame was before the Greek high season, so accommodations would be relatively open. The weather was likely to be mild, especially down south. Our flight had us arriving in Athens at 9 a.m. on a Sunday morning, leaving us plenty of time to find a place to stay without competing with weekend crowds. Danny had studied Ancient Greek in college and was devouring Modern Greek language tapes, so we'd at least have some basic communication skills. Also, I'd recently spent a long car ride listening to stories of a coworker's serendipitous adventures around the world, and

found myself wishing I had the guts to try something like that. Why not go for it now, with the benefit of a competent and more relaxed partner? Life is short.

"Seriously?" I asked.

"Seriously," he said.

→ **Just as I'm** about to get up and start pacing, Danny finally laces up his trail runners and picks up his pack. "Páme! Let's go!" he says cheerfully. We decided during breakfast that we're going up Samaria Gorge today. Our other choice was continuing along the coast, on a remote section that would have allowed a night of true wilderness camping, but we definitely want to see the gorge, and unlike at home, we're finding we don't actually want to escape civilization. The little towns and from-scratch local food are part of the appeal of this journey as much as the mountain views and high-walled canyons.

The 11-mile hike through the gorge is a popular day trip, but most tourists hike down the canyon and then take the ferry back to town. We'll be ascending the canyon, so we'll pass the crowds rather than get stuck in them. And at the top we'll continue hiking, probably to the tiny hamlet of Omalos, which seems to consist mainly of a few hotels. It's a great plan considering it was made this morning. The only problem is that it's 11 a.m. and I can feel our window of opportunity slipping away. Do we have enough time?

After a few kilometers along an old cobble road next to Samaria Creek, we pass the ruins of an old village, then get into the canyon proper. The creek races blue and clear between towering walls that pinch in to just 10 feet wide. For the first hour we're nearly alone with the bird songs.

Then we get to a spot where crossing requires a step into about 3 inches of fast-flowing water. I zip through during a break in the downhill traffic, and turn to see Danny sitting down on the far shore. "What are you doing?" I call out.

"I don't want to get my shoes wet," he yells back. He looks around for a place to sit, and slowly removes his pack. He takes off one shoe, carefully tucks the laces inside, then sets it aside deliberately. Then he peels off his outer sock and stuffs it inside. Then his liner sock. Then the other foot. Then he stands to figure out where to stuff them in his pack. As I stand watching him, it's like someone has turned up the heat beneath a kettle. The low buzz of frustration I've been carrying all morning pitches up toward a shrill whistle and I want to scream at him, at the canyon, at the world. *This isn't worth it! This is the worst idea! If we had a plan, we'd have enough money right now or we'd at least know where to find an ATM, and we'd know where we're sleeping, and you'd have the right shoes, and*

The sun sets over the Omalos Plateau in the Lefka Ori (White Mountains) of southwestern Crete (top left). The author's husband leads the way amid wild thyme bushes on the E4 Trail between Loutro and Agia Roumeli (Samaria Gorge).



You'll see goats (below) on any hike in Crete. The Byzantine Agios Pavlos chapel (right) sits along the E4 path, which hugs secluded coastline and pine forest (far right) to the mouth of the Samaria Gorge.



we would have started early enough in the day for me not to be worried about all those things. We'd have less gear, or maybe more, but it would be the right gear, not shoes you can't get wet, or a tent that lets in mosquitoes, or a sleeping bag I sweated through last night. We wouldn't have to ask strangers for help so often. I wouldn't be freaking out like this every time it seems like our good luck might not cover our latest bout of stupidity. If we had a plan, we'd be having a better trip. I'M TIRED OF THIS.

→ **Meltdowns** didn't seem to be on the horizon when we landed in Athens, 10 days earlier. The first day was actually quite auspicious. After wandering into a great downtown hotel, we set off on foot with a map and no agenda and managed to nose our way to some of the city's under-the-radar attractions without even meaning to. Each one brought a primal and childlike feeling of discovery. *Look what we found!* I'd never been more relaxed. The feeling held as we hopped a ferry to the island of Naxos and spent a few days dayhiking, beach-bumming, and road biking. But by day six, we got antsy for some wilderness. We'd already pinpointed the part of the country most ripe for a backpacking trip in early May: Crete's southwestern coast, where 6,000-foot peaks tower just miles from the beach, and spectacular canyons carve their way between sand and summit. We'd even allowed ourselves the luxury of buying a guidebook to the region.

We hopped a ferry and two buses to the area we had in mind. But the closer we got to hitting the trail, the more my anxiety returned. Would our luck continue in wild places with sparse towns—and where camping, for the most part, wasn't even allowed? As wonderful as this trip was turning out thus far, I couldn't shake my instinct that a good life requires a good plan.

Over the next three days, my mood swung between panic and euphoria. Phew, we found a trail map. Ack, the bus to the trailhead was more than an hour late. Ahh, the crunch of the trail felt good under my boots. Eek, the first hotel we tried was full. Yes, we eventually found a place to stay. And the cycle started anew each day.

So no wonder I'm about to start screaming at Danny while he slowly—*really* slowly—prepares to cross the creek. But I don't say a word. Just as he stands up to finally take the first step across, something clicks. Of course I'm tired. I've been exhausting myself with this fight for control over my circumstances. The problem isn't that things aren't going perfectly. The problem is that I think they ever could.

From this moment on, the trip changes. Or I change. Everything feels lighter somehow.

At about the halfway point up the canyon, just when it starts looking alpine and forested instead of scrubby and coastal, we stop seeing any other hikers and instead have the world to ourselves. As we near the top, the flaky, spiny, white-dusted peaks of the Lefka Ori (White Mountains)

dance in and out of view.

The guards at the canyon's entrance station laugh at our questions about where we can sleep nearby, but the prospect of spending the night searching for a bed doesn't cause my heart to race. We find a Polish couple admiring the view who agree to drive us to Omalos. The first hotel we try doesn't take credit cards, and I feel a flash of dread return: We're running out of cash, due to, um, poor planning. We could poach a campsite if forced, but I'm not eager to try that—plus we still need to eat.

A true travel emergency? No, but it's the kind of uncertainty that would have sent my shoulders crawling into my ears on any previous trip. But I'm finally starting to trust in this process—and in us as a team. We can handle this. We're not going to die here just because the scene isn't vacation-slideshow perfect. And when we eventually find a hotel owner who grudgingly agrees to take our credit card, I'm elated—but not surprised.

→ **The next day**, we opt for the most ambitious route back down to the coast: Hike up and over an off-trail summit, then down through truly remote terrain all the way to the sea.

In the morning, as others head downhill into the gorge, we set off in the opposite direction, switchbacking up into the mountains. After a couple hours of hiking through alpine tundra, we summit the rounded nose of 6,302-foot Strifomadi. To the north and south, we can see ocean, and to the east and west, more peaks



2016 ADVENTURE GUIDE



receding into the distance.

It's exhilarating, being up here all alone, and we whoop and spin in circles. A herd of bell-jingling sheep comes loping over a ridge below us, baahing and sending us into fits of giggles. It'd be nice to stay up here a while, but we've got to keep moving if we want to make it to the coast and stick our feet in the ocean.

We start down, following the path across lingering snowfields to a wide, peak-ringed valley. Then, in a stretch the book says will be remote and dry, Danny realizes he's out of water. Should we turn around and head back up to the snow zone in search of water? Should we continue to the town a few hours away? Should I give up always needing to be in full control of everything? "What do you think we should do?" I ask Danny.

"Keep going. It's going to be just fine."

By the time the town is in sight a couple hours later, we've stopped talking much, my feet are burning, and we're down to the few ounces of water left in my bottle. We trudge down the road,

knowing there's still a long walk ahead to the sea. But we round a bend, and there, under an olive tree, is a spring. It's like a fountain built into a stone wall, and could easily be thousands of years old. It's flowing with fresh, clear water. We take off our shoes and chug bottle after bottle. I'm practically giddy with relief and gratitude. I realize that it's only because I had to let go and trust in the unknown that this spring feels like such a gift.

Eventually, we move again, and meander to the seaside town of Sougia. We walk onto the beach, take off our shoes, and end the hike with our feet in the water just as the evening light paints the whole bay to glory. And instead of hiking more, we decide we've had enough.

The next day, we sit still and do nothing but read on the beach. It's perfect. And something I never would have planned. ■

Senior Content Editor Rachel Zurer has no idea what her next big trip will be. She reluctantly offers the trip-planning advice below.

TRIP PLANNER

Season April to May or September to October for mild temps and fewer crowds; June for less snow in the high country **Guidebook** *The High Mountains of Crete* by Loraine Wilson (\$20; cicerone.co.uk) **Map** Anavasi Lefka Ori and Samaria - Sougia - Paliochora (8€; mountains.gr)

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READERS' CHOICE
YOUR TOP TRIPS FOR

\$5,000

Hire a bush plane pilot and a guide to go salmon fishing in Alaska.

—Eric Tuma

Hire a band and have them appear in random places along the trail to cover my favorite songs.

—Jeff Martin

Thru-hike the Appalachian Trail.

—Wendy Wescott

\$6,500

Become a Leader

I had no pulse and I wasn't breathing. But I wasn't about to die on that forested hillside in Wyoming's Absaroka Range. I was playing the role of a lightning strike victim. The day's lesson plan: Triage A Mass Casualty Incident.

No, that's not something you expect to encounter on a typical weekend hike. But that's the point of taking a 30-day NOLS Outdoor Educator Course—to prepare for adventures that are anything but typical. The students were a diverse mix of military vets, outdoor club leaders, and white-collar professionals considering a career change.

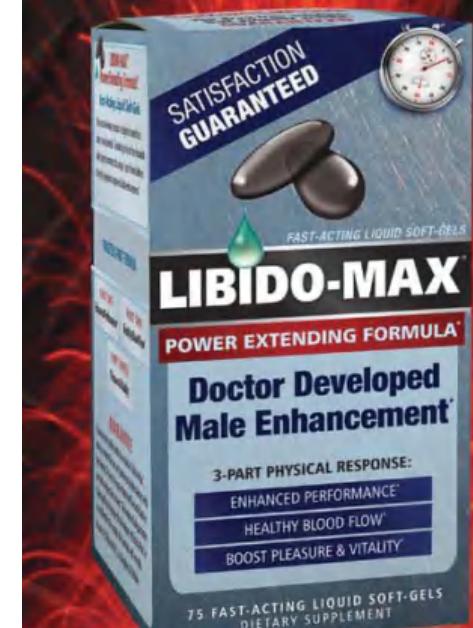
In the first few days, we eased in with skills like grizzly-camping safety, Leave No Trace principles, and baking on an MSR WhisperLite. But by the time the B.O. got really bad, everyone in the group could cook an edible meal, reduce a dislocated shoulder, and assess a river crossing. By the time we'd hiked 100 miles, all 13 students had earned their Wilderness First Responder certification. And while we learned there's no easy lesson plan for "Being an Awesome Trip Leader," we knew we were a lot closer than we'd been before. **Info** nols.edu
by Kristy Holland

Go to Glacier National Park, rent a cabin, and hike the entire park, taking pictures and writing about it.

—Agatha Rodriguez Ramos

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\$1 million?

Name a park.

Facing a budget shortfall and unsympathetic elected officials, Wisconsin's Department of Natural Resources has mentioned selling naming rights to its state parks as a way to fund itself. Subsequently, the state legislature defeated a bill to make the practice illegal. How much to put your name on a wild slice of Wisconsin? Too early to say, but the 66-park system has an annual operating budget of \$16 million, so it won't be cheap.

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For a bottoms-up vantage, walk to the base of the canyon (there's an obvious path from the parking lot). Alternate between wading and rock-hopping for 1.3 miles through and along the Fjaðrá river to the canyon's head.

• Get here

Take the canyon's namesake trail 1.3 miles along the rim to its head. There, stand atop the ledge and peer over the moss-covered cliffs to the river, or stop along the way at any of the overlooks (this ledge is next to the parking area). Overnights isn't allowed here because of the sensitive vegetation, so set up camp 10 minutes away in the village of Kirkjubæjarklaustur at the Kirkjubær II camp-ground (about \$10; kirkjubaer.vpweb.com).

• Don't miss

Huldufólk, or "hidden people" are elves believed to live in rocks. According to legend, a troll is buried on top of this finger-shaped crag.

Glaciers cover 11 percent of Iceland today, melting at a rate of 11 billion tons per year. Over millennia, the meltwater erodes the palagonite rock into the deep gorges that attract backpackers today.

DO IT

From Reykjavik, catch the public bus to Kirkjubæjarklaustur, just 3.5 miles from the canyon (around six hours; \$8; straeto.is). Season Year-round, but winter brings the most solitude (expect temps to dip into the 30s). Permit None Contact bit.do/visit-south-iceland

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